

AN ORGANIZATIONAL ATTACHMENT MODEL: LMX-SOCIAL COMPARISON, JOB  
EMBEDDEDNESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my family. I am so thankful to my father and mother whose sacrifice and efforts started me on this road. They taught me the value of hard work. I am also grateful to my god parents, Rene and Socorro, who always showed me so much love. I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my wife; her patience, love, courage, and resilience throughout this process has been my source of motivation. I am also thankful to rest of my family who helped me immensely through various stages of my life, my tio's, tia's, and my cousins (especially Ernie and Raul).

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PREVIEW

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by

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the relationship between employees' comparisons of relationship quality with their leader (LMXSC) and attitudinal workplace outcomes. Building on the theoretical principle of LMXSC, I postulate that job embeddedness mediates the relationship between perceived relationship quality and psychological ownership. Additionally, I examine the effects of overall organizational justice to understand how environmental variables impact our attachment model. Our results indicate that LMXSC is an important determinant of psychological ownership and job satisfaction and that job embeddedness mediates these relationships. I examine the proposed model with 471 employees from 37 organizations. The results show partial support for the proposed theoretical model. Theoretical contributions, implication for practitioners and future directions are offered.

Keywords:

LMXSC, psychological ownership, job embeddedness



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

One of the most prolific streams in the leadership literature has focused on leader-member exchange (see Ilies et al. (2007) for a review). Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory describes how managers form special relationships with a small number of subordinates (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). The importance of this concept is how it describes and explains the employee-manager relationship with simplicity and elegance. This theory explains how the relationship that employees establish with their managers is often the most important link with the organization; therefore, it has a direct impact on how employees feel about the organization (Manzoni & Barsoux, 2002). The byproducts of high-quality relationships are positive outcomes for employees and managers (e.g., increased trust and satisfaction) (Liden et al., 1997; Erdogan & Enders, 2007).

Within this thesis, I explore leader-member exchange social comparison (LMXSC). This construct represents the comparison that employees make when they evaluate their current standing with their supervisor in relation to the standing other group members have with the same supervisor (Vidyarthi et al., 2010). The theoretical foundation of LMXSC is based on LMX and social comparison theory, which states that individuals exist within a social structure and thus evaluate their current social standing within a group to help define themselves as well as others (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1996). Within a work context, social comparison theory suggests that employees evaluate the work environment to decipher where they stand within the organization (Greenberg, Ashton-James & Ashkanasy, 2007). Social comparisons change how individuals view the world, thus influencing their behaviors, motivation, and attitudes (Wood,

1989). For this reason, when employees compare their current standing with a supervisor against that of other group members, it may lead to different attitudinal and behavioral responses.

Attachment theory may provide a useful framework to examine the quality of the relationship between subordinates and supervisors, as a higher-quality relationship may establish some of the foundation for attachment. This theory is based on the notion that humans have an innate need to feel comfort and security (Bowlby, 1973). Therefore, I theorize that within an organizational context, employees who perceive having a better-quality relationship with their supervisor (compared to others) will also believe they receive more attention and support from their supervisor (Wayne et al., 1997), which in turn could lead to positive feelings towards the organization. Positive perceptions of the leader and environment could help employees stay within the company. The concept of job embeddedness (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001) was created to expand on why employees decide to stay within their organizations. This construct gauges the extent to which employees create stronger ties within and outside an organization, thus making it more difficult for them to leave (Lee et al., 2004).

By developing strong ties with the organization, employees can then develop organizational psychological ownership. Psychological ownership (PSO) is described as a state of mind through which individuals feel or perceive ownership over tangible or intangible objects, even without any legal recourse (Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). Employees' felt psychological ownership can be considered a psychological resource for organizations because of the positive feelings associated with the construct such as sense of belonging and self-efficacy (see Fredrickson, 2001; Avey et al., 2009a). Similar to other organizational resources, psychological ownership can be assessed, developed, and even exploited to achieve greater performance. Most of the research associated with PSO has focused on the outcomes associated

with feelings of owning the organization, such as performance, organizational citizenship behaviors (Park et al., 2013), and organizationally-based self-esteem (Pan et al., 2014). Despite this, a great deal of research is necessary to understand the underlying factors that promote the development of PSO.

## **1.1 Purpose of Study**

It is intuitive to think that when employees perceive being treated unfairly by leader or organization there will be negative outcomes that are associated with these feelings, for instance, lower levels of trust in leaders' decision making abilities, greater levels of stress, and increased turnover will occur. For managers to implement practical changes, it is important to comprehend how and to what extent justice influences attitudes and behaviors.

Employees' perceptions of justice or fairness play a major role in determining whether they build a relationship with an organization (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Although most of the attention has been on the individual dimensions (e.g. distributive, procedural) of such perceptions, recent efforts have focused on a more holistic approach referred to as overall organizational justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Greenberg, 2001). Colquitt and Shaw (2005) advised that a global view of perceived justice should be utilized when the goal is to find evidence for its impact on global attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, such as PSO (as in this study). Employees' perceptions of fairness are important because they are conducive to stronger bond development with their leader(s) and promote subsequent feelings of attachment towards the organization. Leaders often take the role of mentors, guides, and representatives of the organization; therefore, employees' perceptions of organizational fairness are essential for their long-term well-being (e.g., career development and expectations; Scandura, 1997).

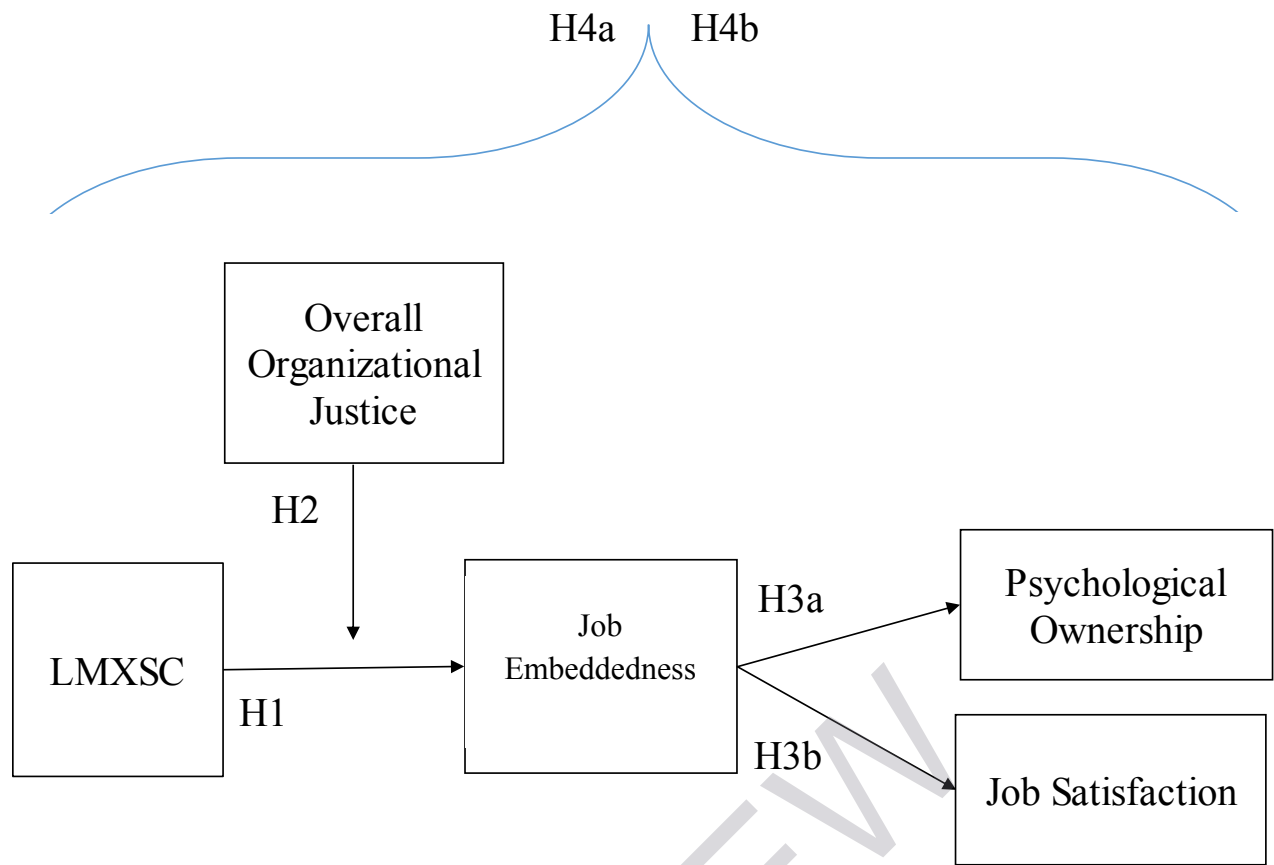


FIGURE 1.1: Hypothesized Model.

As shown in our model (see Figure 1.1), I predict that the comparison of one's own to others' perceived relationship quality with managers (LMXSC) leads to higher job embeddedness, which in turn acts as a mediator between LMXSC and the outcomes of psychological ownership and job satisfaction. I integrate the theories of attachment and social comparison to explain how higher levels of LMXSC will have a positive impact on the aforementioned outcomes when employees feel higher levels of embeddedness. That is, the positive affect (e.g., feelings of trust) an employee feels toward their leader (due to a better-quality relationship) will result in greater job embeddedness, which in turn will allow individuals to feel greater PSO and job satisfaction. In contrast, more negative perceived affect due to lower-quality relationships will not allow individuals to generate feelings of embeddedness. Thus,



having lower embeddedness will ultimately lead to lower satisfaction and sense of ownership. I also expect that overall organizational justice will moderate the relationship between LMXSC and embeddedness.

The study I conducted to assess the validity of these expectations fulfills three main goals. First, I extend leadership literature, specifically advancing LMXSC by examining leader-member relationship comparisons as an antecedent to embeddedness and perceptions of ownership. Second, I adopt a novel approach by drawing on attachment and social comparison theories to explain how relationship quality comparison can lead to greater ownership perceptions. Lastly, I introduce overall organizational justice as a multi-level contextual factor.

## **1.2 Questions**

- (1) How do perceptions of quality relationship with leader impact employees' perceptions of job embeddedness?
- (2) How do perceptions of quality relationship with leader impact employees' psychological ownership and satisfaction?
- (3) Does job embeddedness mediate the relationship among employees' comparisons of leader quality relationship and ownership?
- (4) Does job embeddedness mediate the relationship among employees' comparisons of leader quality relationship and satisfaction?
- (5) What is the overall impact of justice on the mediated model, between LMXSC and ownership and satisfaction?

## **1.3 Organization of the Study**

In the first chapter, the introduction, main objectives of this thesis are introduced. The introduction is then followed by five chapters which include literature review, methods, references and appendices.

Chapter 2 develops a comprehensive literature review for LMX theory, Attachment theory, and Social Comparison theory.

Chapter 3 introduces the hypotheses built on the idea of attachment as a mechanism for developing a deeper relationship with the organization.

Chapter 4, details the parameters for this study; the characteristics of the sample, the design of the study, and the measures used for data collection. This further produces a statistical analysis for the study.

Chapter 5 analyzes and examines the results for the statistical analysis and discusses the theoretical and practical implications in this study. This chapter further delineates future research and limitations.