

# LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE AS THE MEDIATOR OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND JOB SATISFACTION

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the influence of perceived organizational support on employee job satisfaction. We propose a model with leader-member exchange as the mediator of the relationship between perceived organizational support and job satisfaction. We tested our hypotheses using a survey data collected from 80 employees of a public organization in Erzurum/Turkey. As a result of the study it is found out that there is a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and job satisfaction, and LMX has a partial effect on this relationship.*

**Keywords:** Leader-member exchange; Perceived organizational support; Job satisfaction

## INTRODUCTION

The human resources play a critical role in the activity of an organization in today wild competitive market. The development and survival of an organization are basically determined by human and intellectual capital. It can be said that a convenient view to human resource management and creating an organizational climate appreciated by workers and contributes to satisfying their needs, are necessary conditions to be successful. An organization, thus, can achieve its strategic goals.

Organizations are social systems where human resources are the most important factors for effectiveness and efficiency. Organizations need effective managers and workers to achieve their objectives, and cannot succeed without their human resource efforts and commitment. Therefore, organizations need to understand factors affecting their human resource performance. In this point of view, job satisfaction has been an area of great interest for practitioners and researchers. Although there have been many studies related to the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and job satisfaction, in this study we investigate the leader-member exchange (LMX) as the mediator of this relationship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Perceived Organizational Support

Social exchange relationships, which are useful in raising the work performance and attitudes of the workers, have been deemed worthy of research up to now. Social exchange perspective is a primary approach to explain the relationship between employee and organization. Social exchange theory may be rooted in old theories of social behavior (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1968). That is, any interaction between individuals is an exchange of resources. The resources exchanged may be not only visible, such as goods or money, but also invisible, such as social benefits or friendship. The main assumption of social exchange theory is that parties/sides enter into and maintain relationships with the expectation that doing so will be rewarding.

Organizational support theory reminds social exchange perspective -wherein employment is viewed as the trade of effort and loyalty by the employee for tangible benefits and social resources from the organization- to explain employee-organization relationships (Cropanzano, Mitchell, 2005; Loi, Hangyue, Foley, 2006).

Eisenberger et al. (1986) defined perceived organizational support as global beliefs of employees concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Employees develop these global beliefs in order to meet needs for approval, affiliation, and esteem, as well as to estimate organizational readiness to pay their increased effort with greater rewards.

Briefly, employees who perceive their employer to be highly supportive will (1) more often interpret organizational gains and losses as their own, (2) develop evaluation biases in assessing organizational characteristics and actions, and (3) adopt organizational values and norms as their own (Eisenberger et al., 1990).

POS has attracted considerable interest because of the potential value of viewing the employee-organization relationship from the employees' viewpoint, the clarity of the POS construct, and the strong associations of POS with affective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and other attitudinal outcomes. POS plays a central role in the employee-organization relationship and has important implications for improving employees' well-being and favorable orientation toward the organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017).

Taking mutually, employees with high POS are obliged to respond favorably to the organization in the form of positive job attitudes or organizational behaviors. According to the literature, POS is related to a variety of important outcomes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, and job performance (Loi, Hang-yue, Foley, 2006).

## **Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is one of the most widely studied work-related attitudes in the fields of industrial and organizational psychology, and organizational behavior. Hoppock (1935) initially brought this term into usage in 1935 and defined job satisfaction as "any combination of psychological and environmental circumstances that cause a person to say truthfully: I am satisfied with my job". Job satisfaction simply indicates one's pleasure with the job. The most accepted meaning in literature, according to Cranny et.al. (1992) is the degree to which one enjoys doing his/her job.

Ahmet et al. (2010) propose that the discussion on job satisfaction started with the publication of Herzberg's book named "The Motivation to Work" in 1959. In this book engineers and accountants were asked to narrate a story about the event when they went exceptionally bad or exceptionally good. According to those situations Herzberg divided work dimensions in two elements: Motivators (satisfying factors) and hygiene factors. Motivators or satisfying (intrinsic) factors were achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth. Hygiene (extrinsic) factors were administration of the company and its policy, supervisory behavior, relationship with superiors, working environment, salary, relationships with co-workers, relationships with subordinates, status, personal life, and safety measures. Herzberg implemented that the causes of job satisfaction lay in the intrinsic factors and the causes of dissatisfaction lay in extrinsic factors.

Job satisfaction is typically defined as the pleasurable or positive emotional condition coming from the assessment of one's job or job experience (Locke, 1976). McShane and Steen (2009) characterize job satisfaction as "a collection of attitudes about different aspects of the job and work context".

Locke (1976) reveals the dimensions used in the assessment of job satisfaction as the job itself, payment, promotion, working conditions, benefits of the work, fellow workers, personal values, and employee-employer relationship.

According to Luthans (1998) there are three important features of job satisfaction:

- Job satisfaction is an emotional response to a job situation so it cannot be seen, it can only be deduced.
- Job satisfaction is often determined by how well outcome meets or exceeds expectations. For example, if members feel that they are working harder than others but are receiving fewer rewards, they will probably have negative attitudes towards the work, the boss and or co-workers. On the other hand, if they feel there is justice then they are likely to have positive attitudes towards the job.

- Job satisfaction indicates several related attitudes which are most important characteristics of a job about which people have effective response. These are: the work itself, pay, promotion opportunities, supervision and co-workers.

Green (2010) posits that job satisfaction has been used as a measure of job quality by many writers. Thus, when the quality of work is treated, the job satisfaction concept is taken as an indicator for an assessment for employment policies.

Job satisfaction is so important to organizations because it reduces employee turnover, laziness, absenteeism, tardiness, and health setbacks due to stress and increases organizational commitment (Rusbult, et al. 1988; Tet, Meyer, 1993; Moser, 1997; Allen, 2006; Chimanikire, 2007). Workers who are satisfied at their workplaces show positive attitudes in their homes and make a psychologically healthy society. On the other hand, dissatisfied employees are more likely to quit their jobs or be absent than satisfied employees.

## Leader-member exchange

The quality of relationships between supervisors and subordinates is often studied via Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Harris, Wheeler, Kacman, 2009). Its roots may be traced in role theory and social exchange theory.

It suggests that exchanges (for example, social and work interactions) occur between supervisors and subordinates, from these exchanges, supervisors and subordinates develop relationships of changing quality through the role-making process (Graen, Uhl-Bien, 1995). The theory is targeted at the dyadic (two-way) level and, therefore, has traditionally focused on explaining the relationship a leader has with one follower and varying it from the others. At the beginning LMX research categorized the relationship leaders could have with their followers into two groups: the in-group and out-group, more recently referred to as high-quality and low-quality exchanges, respectively (Fisk, Friesen, 2012). The quality of relationship is characterized by respect, trust, and mutual obligation (Graen, Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Northouse (2001) lists four strengths of LMX as follows:

- It certainly describes the reality of in and out groups within organizations.
- It focuses not only on the characteristics or behaviors regarding one element of the leadership process, but also on the relationship between leaders and followers.
- It emphasizes the importance of interpersonal communication aspects of leadership as one of the necessities for successful leadership.
- A large body of research has found that a high level of LMX is associated with organizational outcome variables.

A high-quality LMX relationship consists of four dimensions: *contribution* (performing work beyond minimal expectations), *affect* (friendship and liking), *loyalty*, and *professional respect* for one's capabilities.

High LMX relationships have resulted in greater access to resources, whereas low LMX relationships have been associated with fewer resources, more restricted information, and lower job satisfaction (Laschinger, et al., 2007; Harris, Wheeler, Kacman, 2009). In a high-quality exchange relationship both parties accept their mutual-interests and agree to maintain shared superordinate goals. High-quality relationships have been described as a partnering of colleagues, where individuals go beyond formal organizational roles to achieve desired goals (Graen, Uhl-Bien, 1995). Conversely, leaders and followers in low-quality relationships closely hold to their respective organizational roles and do not go beyond those bounds.

Research has linked LMX quality to positive individual and organizational outcomes, such as job satisfaction, commitment, and job performance (Laschinger, 2007; Volmer, et al., 2011).

## Recent Studies

In the literature there have been many studies related to perceived organizational support (POS), job satisfaction (JS) and the leader-member exchange (LMX). Here are some recent studies related to these concepts.

Kim and Barak (2015) researched the mediating roles of LMX and POS as social exchange relationships in the role stress-turnover intention relationship using a longitudinal perspective. The findings underscore the importance of both social exchanges, LMX and POS, in managing child welfare workers.

Malik et.al, (2015) investigated the effect of LMX quality relationship on employee motivation, stress, turnover, satisfaction and psychological empowerment. They found that high quality relationship positively associated with other variables.

Altunoğlu, Bulgurcu Gürel (2015) examined a model of consequences of leader-member exchange and perceived organizational support on organizational innovation. Their results indicate that when leader-member exchange increases, organizational innovation level also escalates. In the same way, as perceived organizational support increases, organizations might perform well in terms of innovation. They suggested that organizations concentrating on creativity and innovation should consider leader selection with an emphasis on leader-member exchanges and organizational support facilities for employees.

Alegre, Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent (2016) hold job satisfaction in their study differently from the literature and investigated the collective effect of different employee relationships on job satisfaction.

Bano, et.al, (2017) tested a causal model of interrelationships among perceived organizational support (POS), perceived social support (PSS) and job satisfaction (JS) via structural equation modeling. More specifically, they examined the direct and indirect effects of perceived organizational support on job satisfaction. Their results indicate that: i) POS positively effects job satisfaction and that ii) PSS serves as a mechanism through which perceived organizational support effects job satisfaction.

Liao, et.al, (2017) investigated the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX), job satisfaction (JS), life satisfaction (LS), and psychological capital (PC) for employee relation management. According to this study good LMX increases psychological capital; psychological capital enhances both JS and LS, and psychological capital serves as a full mediator for both JS and LS.

Kurtessis et.al, (2017) hold a very valuable study about organizational support theory (OST). They carried out a meta-analytic assessment of OST. Their results indicate that there are various ways of conveying to employees that the organization cares about their well-being and values their contributions. Supportive aspects of leadership, fairness, human resources practices, and working conditions were all related to POS. They explain that many, if not most, chronic or recurring elements of employees' relationship with the organization influence the employees' perception of the organization's favorable or unfavorable disposition toward them.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative study was held to empirically explore the mediating effect of LMX on the relationship between POS and job satisfaction.

Graduate students of Labor Economics and Industrial Relations Program of Atatürk University administered the surveys at the beginning of the year 2018. The data were collected from 80 employees of a public organization located in Erzurum/Turkey.

SPSS (version 22), AMOS and PROCESS Macro programs were employed to analyze the data. Means, standard deviations and inter-correlations for the research variables were calculated using SPSS, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for each variable and research model using AMOS, and to test hypotheses PROCESS Macro was applied to the main model.

A quantitative questionnaire, combining five-point Likert scales measuring POS, job satisfaction and LMX was distributed to the sampled employees. The choice of this scale range was aimed to bring the respondents to take a stand regarding each of the research variables. The respondents were asked to refer to their current organization, and to answer a range of questions regarding their perceptions toward the variables examined in the study.

## Hypotheses

On the basis of literature reviewed and the aim of the study, we hypothesize;

H1: Increased POS leads to an increase in job satisfaction.

H2: Increased LMX leads to an increase in job satisfaction.

H3: LMX -as a mediator- influence the relationship between POS and job satisfaction.

## Measures

POS was measured using 10-item instrument of shorter version of *Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS)* adapted to Turkish by Turunç, Çelik (2010). SPOS initially was developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986) with 36-item. Stassen, Ursel (2009) shortened it to 10-item and used that version for their study.

Job satisfaction was measured using 14-item instrument of Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldham (1974). JDS was adapted to Turkish by Güler (1990).

LMX was measured by 8-item instrument of Questionnaire of LMX adapted from several international LMX scales to Turkish by Koçak (2017).

## Findings

When we applied reliability procedure to the data, some items were extracted before analyses due to their corrected item total correlation values were below .40 (POS 6, POS 7, and JDS 1) (Gliem, Gliem, 2003). After this correction all Cronbach Alpha values exceeded .7 (POS=.931; JDS=.906; LMX=.931), meeting the acceptable standard of more than .7 (Nunnally, 1978). Therefore, all scales had extremely high reliability.

To assess the fitness of scales and measurement model (MM), a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed by AMOS. The CFA results, as presented in Table 01, suggest that fit indices for scales and measurement model were reasonable.

**Table 1.** Results of confirmatory factor analysis

	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	NNFI	SRMR
POS	1.340	.066	.987	.934	.953	.042
JDS	1.734	.076	.967	.907	.901	.057
LMX	1.455	.077	.984	.932	.953	.040
MM	1.631	.079	.942	.901	.912	.067
Reasonable values	$0 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 5$	$\leq .08$	$\geq .9$	$\geq .9$	$\geq .9$	$\leq .08$

Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and inter-correlations between all variables are presented in Table 02. Consistent with our expectation, POS is significantly correlated with JDS ( $r = .74, p < .01$ ). This means that employee with higher POS will be more satisfied with his/her job. In addition, LMX is also positively correlated with JDS ( $r = .79, p < .01$ ). This result suggests that high quality LMX raises employee job satisfaction.

**Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and inter-correlations of variables

	$\bar{x}$	SD	Cronbach Alpha	1	2	3
POS	3.112	.941	.931	1		
JDS	3.481	.737	.906	.74**	1	
LMX	3.693	.924	.931	.80**	.79**	1

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

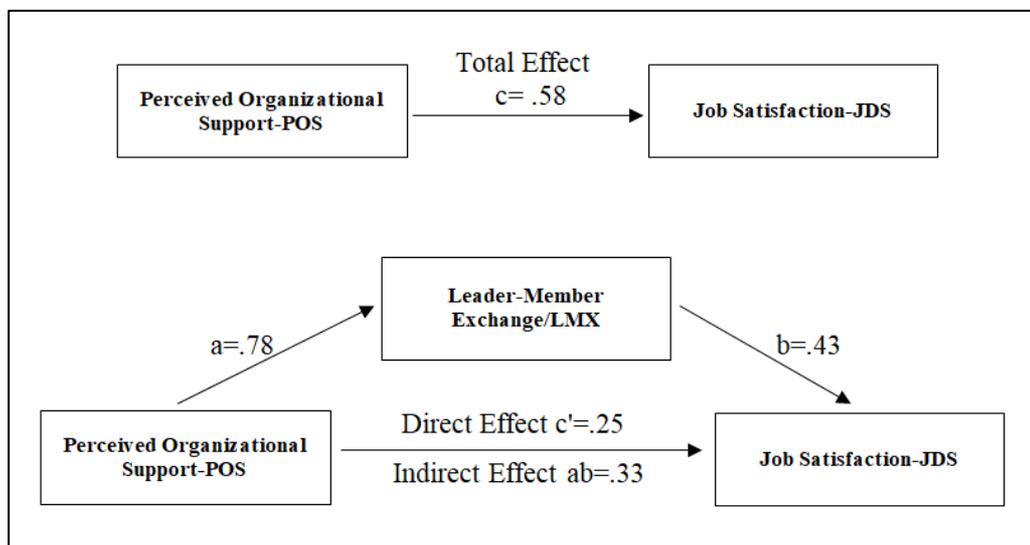
To test hypotheses, PROCESS Macro program developed by Hayes (2013) applied to data. Table 03 demonstrates these results.

The relationship between POS and LMX was found to be significantly positive, ( $B=.78$ ,  $t=11.67$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Also, POS was significantly positively related to JDS, as hypothesized in Hypothesis 1 ( $B=.58$ ,  $t=9.82$ ,  $p<.001$ ). LMX was significantly positively related to JDS, as hypothesized in Hypothesis 2 ( $B=.43$ ,  $t=4.86$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Finally, POS influenced JDS indirectly through the effect of LMX. This indirect effect was found to be positive ( $B=.33$ ), as hypothesized in Hypothesis 3. The results of two-tailed significance test (assuming a normal distribution) illustrated a significant indirect effect (Sobel  $z = 4.49$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Bootstrap analysis confirmed the Sobel test results with 95% CI and did not contain zero (0.2149, 5969). According to this result it can be said that LMX partially mediated the relationship between POS and JDS. Therefore, Hypotheses 3 was supported. Figure 01 shows the findings of research.

**Table 3.** Results of regression analyze related to mediating effect of LMX

Variable	B	SE	t	P
<i>Direct and total effects</i>				
POS effect on LMX	.78	.067	11.67	.000
POS effect on JDS	.58	.059	9.82	.000
LMX effect on JDS	.43	.088	4.86	.000
POS effect on JDS by mediating of LMX	.25	.086	2.85	.006
Variable	Value	SE	z	p
<i>Indirect effect and significance</i>				
Sobel	.33	.1028	4.49	.000
Variable	M	SE	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
<i>Bootstrap results for indirect effect</i>				
Effect	.32	.0980	.2149	.5969

N=80, LL=lower limit, UL=upper limit, CI=confidence interval



**Figure 1.** Mediated outcomes on JDS showing indirect effect of POS through LMX

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

In achieving and sustaining competitive advantage in domestic or international market, human resources of a firm are one of the determinative categories. According to the proponents of The Resource-Based View approach to competitive advantage, internal resources of a firm are more important than external factors, because these resources are actually what helps a firm utilize opportunities and defuse threats. Internal resources include physical resources, human resources, and organizational resources. Human resources include all employees, training, experience, intelligence, knowledge, skills, and abilities (David, 2011). Practices that promote employee motivation and effort, knowledge, skills, and abilities, and opportunities for employee's contribution generate favorable conditions for the development of resources and capabilities that create value for organizations, contributing to their performance and to the emergence of sustained competitive advantages (Brito, Oliveira, 2016). Job satisfaction, perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange investigated in this study are important subjects in terms of human resources. Because of this, the results are valuable to be taken into account by researchers, practitioners, managers and firms.

In this study we basically investigate the mediating effect of leader-member exchange (LMX) on the relationship between perceived organizational support (POS) and job satisfaction (JDS). As a result of the study we found out that there is a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and job satisfaction. There are similar results in the field (Baranik et al. 2010; Bogler, Nir, 2012; Eisenberger et al., 1997; Miao and Kim, 2010; Wann-Yih, Htaik, 2011; Anafarta, 2015).

Another result was the positive relationship between LMX and JDS. Fisk and Friesen (2012); Bang (2011); Flickinger et al. (2016); Lin and Ma (2004), Mardanov et al. (2008), and Harris et al. (2009) revealed similar results for their studies. Finally, we found out that POS influenced JDS indirectly through the effect of LMX. This indirect effect was found to be positive. In other words, LMX partially mediated this relationship. That is, POS influences the level of worker job satisfaction, but LMX is also important on this influence.

According to Eisenberger, et al. (1986), POS is fostered by two important beliefs of employees: (1) the personification of organization, and (2) rewards based on the organization's discretion. Through personification of organization, employees assign human characteristics to the organization and view actions by agents in the organization (e.g. managers) as actions of the organization as a whole. LMX affects POS because the leader is a formal representative of the organization (Eisenberger, Rhoades, 2002). On the other hand, employees who are well supported by the organization are likely to desire and accept high-quality relationships with their supervisors (Wayne et al., 2002).

Erdogan and Enders (2007) held a similar research. They expected that supervisors with high POS would have more resources to exchange with subordinates. Thus, supervisor POS should enhance the relationships between LMX and job satisfaction and LMX and job performance for subordinates. They found the positive relationship between LMX and job satisfaction was stronger when supervisors had high POS.

In conclusion, if an organization desires to improve its workers' job satisfaction level, then it should increase the level of workers' perceived organizational support, achieving high quality leader-member exchange.

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