

Mediating Role of Supervisory Communication Practices on Relations Between Leader–Member Exchange and Perceived Employee Commitment to Workgroup

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Based on a study on employees and their immediate manager in a Malaysian organization, we examine the total, direct, and indirect effects of supervisory communication practices with LMX and group commitment using structural equation modeling and bootstrap procedure. Based on our analysis, we found that within the group where the supervisor and subordinates are embedded, positive relationships communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication partially mediated the relation between LMX and group commitment. The consequences of these findings are discussed and elaborated in this article.

Keywords: Mediating; Supervisory Communication; Relations; Leader–Member Exchange; Employee; Commitment; Workgroup

Ostensibly, there have been many research studies that support the importance of communication between supervisor and their subordinates (Dansereau & Markham, 1987; Jablin, 1979). Within an organization for example, a supervisor plays a monumental role as information provider to their subordinates at various levels (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Miles, Patrick, & King, 1996; Schnake, Dumler, Cochran, & Barnett, 1990; Varona, 1996). Several studies also have examined the supervisory communication within the framework of leader–member exchange theory (LMX).

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These studies mainly focus on antecedent and longitudinal explorations of LMX and communication links (Fairhurst, 2001; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Lee, 1997; Lee & Jablin, 1995). Nevertheless, several important questions remain unanswered in the LMX literature. One of these questions concerns how and whether supervisor–subordinate communication influences peoples within leader–member dyadic relationships (Sias & Jablin, 1995).

Researchers exploring LMX often assume that subordinates in different LMX conditions communicate differently with their supervisors, however there is not much empirical research testing this idea. Thus, this study hopes to address this gap and contribute to a better understanding of supervisory–subordinate communication. This is important because communication is the fundamental component of social relationships (i.e., development, maintenance, and demise (Duck, 1994). Honeycutt and McCann (2008) further emphasized that within dyad, relationships exist through communication and that they exist through thinking about the partner outside of their presence. However, surprisingly communication remains as the background element in LMX literature as opposed to being the primary process in the social LMX development (Lee, 2005). Although the implications of dyadic relationships for group outcomes within a larger organization's social system have been implicit in social exchange literature, dyadic communication in workgroups have not been made theoretically explicit, nor have they have been empirically tested in a systematic manner (Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, & Gully, 2003; Sias, 2005; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997, 2005).

The present article attempts to advance the research on dyadic exchange relationships in several ways. First, we respond to the call by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) to examine the impact of dyadic LMX relationships within a larger system of workgroups. To do so, we develop and test a multilevel model that specifies the relationship between LMX, supervisory communication, and commitment within a team context. Second, we hypothesized that supervisory communication is a process variable that mediates the relationship between LMX and commitment. This line of research addresses Sias (2005) call to identify the underlying process variables linking LMX and important work outcomes, such as commitment to workgroup. Exploring these relationships using causality and multilevel analysis is theoretically and practically imperative because it provides a more comprehensive and realistic picture of the interpersonal exchange relationships between supervisors, subordinates, and coworkers in organizations.

Review of Literature

Leader–Member Exchange Theory

In proposing LMX model, Graen and his colleagues (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, Orris, & Johnson, 1973) suggested that leaders do not have identical relationships across their subordinates in the work group, but develop unique dyadic relationships with each subordinate

because of role making behavior (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Scandura & Graen, 1984). Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998) identified the potential for other “currencies of exchange” outside work behaviors for supervisor and subordinates. This approach to LMX has received favorable supports (Liden & Maslyn, 1993, 1998; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Currencies of exchange include affect, loyalty, and/or professional respect between members, which can occur in varying amounts and combinations. Studies indicate that, supervisor and subordinates focus on different currencies of exchange from their partners. Supervisors employ more work-related currencies, and subordinates focus employ more socially related currency (Day & Crain, 1992; Dockery & Steiner, 1990). A work-related currency is a perceived contribution, whereas the social currencies consist of affect, loyalty and professional respect. This study adopts the multidimensional view of LMX proposed by Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998).

Supervisory Communication

Supervisory communication has been broadly defined as “an exchange of information and influence among organizational members where one of those members has official authority to direct and evaluate other members of organizational activities” (Hatfield & Huseman, 1982; Huseman, Hatfield, Boulton, & Gatewood, 1980; Jablin, 1979; Miles et al., 1996). Katz and Kahn (1978) conceptualized and expanded the basic components of communication (source, receiver, channel and message), while specifying the direction of information flow in terms of supervisor–subordinate relationships. Huseman, Hatfield, Boulton, and Gatewood (1980), through a series of qualitative and quantitative studies expanded Katz and Kahn (1978) works, developed seven types of communication that occurred in supervisor–subordinate relationships, namely: (1) Direction, (2) Information, (3) Rationale, (4) Feedback, (5) Positive, (6) Expression, (7) Negative expression, and (8) Participation.

Miles et al. (1996) employed and tested Huseman’s, Hatfield’s, Boulton’s, and Gatewood’s (1980) seven types of supervisory communication. Miles et al. (1996) found four separate dimensions of supervisory communication behaviors that can reflect working and social communication in supervisor–subordinate relationships, namely: (1) Positive relationship communication, (2) Upward openness communication, (3) Negative relationship communication, and (4) Job-relevant communication. Positive relationship communication focuses on supervisor seeking suggestions from subordinates, being interested in them as people, relating to them in a casual manner, and allowing them to contribute input on important decisions. Upward openness communication is characterized by the opportunity to question a supervisor’s instruction and vary their disagreement with a supervisor. Negative relationship communication deals with supervisory ridiculing subordinates and criticizing them in the presence of others. Job-relevant communication includes a supervisor’s feedback on performances; information includes a supervisor’s feedback on performance, information about rules and policies, job instructions, work assignments, and schedules, and goals.

Commitment

The concept of commitment is one of the major factors in determining the relationship between individuals and an organization or their respective work group (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). A review of the literature suggests that there are various distinct approaches to defining commitment. Commitment has been defined as “a strong desire to maintain membership in an organization” (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1979). It has also been defined as identification with goals and values between an individual and the organization (Buchanan, 1974) or an exchange of behavior to get benefits that will be appreciated by others (Meyer & Allen, 1984). These definitions focus on the relationships that individuals have with an organization.

Mathieu and Zajac (1990) claim meta-analyses of organizational commitment to have uncovered two main issues. First, according to them, the affective involvement in organizational commitment proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990) that is, the extent to which people experience a sense of identification and involvement with an organization is the most relevant as a behavioral predictor of individual behavior in organization (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). A second point that emerged from Mathieu and Zajac’s (1990) meta-analysis is the focus of commitment measures might better predict behavior, such as commitment to workgroup than broad measures of organizational commitment. Results of various individual studies seem to point to the conclusion that particular forms of commitment may be related to specific behavior at work (Randall, Fedor, & Longenecker, 1990). Accordingly, in a theoretical analysis, Reichers (1985) has pointed out that although the concept of commitment refers to acceptance of the goals and values of an organization, it is important to bear in mind that organizations usually encompass many different constituencies that may have conflicting goals. Therefore, it seems essential to specify the nature of these values and goals in order to predict members of organizational behavior in their respective work group (Ellemers, Gilder, & Heuvel, 1998; Ellemers, Rijswijk, Bruins, & Gilder, 1998).

The “affective commitment concept” refers to an attitudinal construct rather than a calculative investment in the organization’s response, to the extent to which the organization invests in its employees. Thus, affective commitment can be referred to as the extent to which people experience a sense of identification and involvement with an organization. Based on this concept and in order to determine what makes people exert themselves at work, or how they choose to devote their energies, we argue, goal specification should be made within teamwork. According to Allen and Meyer (1996), employees with strong affective commitment remain with the group because they want to be in the group. Therefore, we examined the extent to which supervisors perceived their subordinates committed to common group goals as a dependent variable.

Hypothesis Development

The LMX literature suggests that LMX quality has a direct impact on subordinates job satisfaction and committed to the organization (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Miller & Prichard, 1992), receive resources, and support

that will increase job performance (Dunegan, Duchon, & Uhl-Bien, 1992), supervisory delegation (Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998), facilitate social desirability (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), positively impact their well being (Epitropaki & Martin, 1999), and reduce absenteeism (van Dierendonck, Le Blanc, & van Breukelen, 2002), differing interaction patterns and attitudes between a supervisor and their subordinates (Fairhurst, 2001; Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989; Harris & Kacmar, 2005; Kacmar et al., 2003; Lee, 1997, 2001; Michael, Guo, Wiedenbeck, & Ray, 2006; Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2002; Yukl & Fu, 1999). Within the framework of LMX on Malaysian studies, Lo et al. (2006) and Ansari et al. (2007) have demonstrated the link between LMX quality and work outcomes. Both studies demonstrated a significant impact of LMX on commitment and satisfaction. LMX quality has a positive direct impact on organizational citizenship behavior and indirect positive effect of LMX on satisfaction and commitment through delegation (Ansari, Lee, & Aafaqi, 2007; Lo, Ramayah, & Hui, 2006). However, neither these studies investigated and interpreted communication as process variables in the correlation of LMX and work outcomes. In sum, it appears highly likely that LMX quality affects work outcomes and communication behaviors within dyads and between dyads in a group.

LMX literatures also suggest effective supervisory communication can help organization members to achieve job satisfaction and to be more fully committed to their organization. Some communication scholars suggest that effective supervisory communication in an organization can also contribute to its effectiveness (Kacmar et al., 2003; Lee & Jablin, 1995). For example, supervisor-subordinates communication practices have a strong influence on job satisfaction (Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, & Lesniak, 1978; Miles et al., 1996; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Schwiger & Denisi, 1991), job performance (Alexander, Helms, & Wilkins, 1989) and organizational commitment (Varona, 1996). In fact, a study by Sias (2005) showed that the communication quality that a subordinate received from a supervisor was a better predictor of subordinates' job satisfaction and commitment than LMX, when these two variables were analyzed together.

Communication literatures also suggest that communication within the supervisor-subordinate relationships has implications for each member working together in a group (Kramer, 1995, 2004). A study by Sias and Jablin (1995) for example, found that differences in the quality of a supervisor's communication exchanges with her or his subordinates have an impact on each member of the work group. Each member of the work group is aware of the differential treatment and, in fact, talks about it. Furthermore, individuals in low quality versus high quality LMX relationships with their supervisors have more conversations about differential treatments with their peers. Sias (1996) also found that members of a work group interacting about differential treatment by their supervisor served to create and reinforce social perceptions about differential treatment in the work group (Sias, 1996; Sias & Jablin, 1995). These studies show that supervisory communication is considered as having vital factors for different supervisor-subordinate relationship qualities. It is also shown that the quality of communication with supervisors directly and indirectly drives and reinforces subordinates' perceptions of their

respective work group relationship (Lee, 2005). Thus, further exploration in this area is certainly warranted.

In a high-quality relationship, a supervisor is more likely to give high quality communication (more positive relationship, upward openness, and job-relevant and less negative relationship communication). This situation leads subordinates in the work group to perceive themselves as engaging in meaningful work and therefore they have a sense of purpose and a feeling of attachment to the work group (Ellemers, Gilder, & Haslam, 2004). Consequently, subordinates in the workgroup benefit their supervisor by being committed and going the extra mile. Past studies have revealed that supervisory communication also has positive effects on subordinates (Miles et al., 1996; Yrle, Hartman, & Galle, 2002). Therefore, the following hypothesis is advanced for testing:

- H1: Supervisory communication practices (positive relationships communication, upward openness communication, negative relationships communication, and job-relevant communication) mediate the relations between LMX and group commitment.

The hypothesis advanced in this study indicates that the relationships quality (high or low LMX quality) within a workgroup is also likely to reflect communication quality. Relationships between supervisors and subordinates are enhanced through open and honest communication interactions in which subordinates and supervisors both talk about their feelings regarding the work environment and their personal lives and share forthcoming sensitive information (Sias & Cahill, 1998). Within the workgroup, group member's participations also tend to be less careful and engage in less restriction in their communication (Sias & Jablin, 1995). We would therefore expect supervisory communication to play a role in determining the relationship between LMX and commitment. This notion was supported in the field study conducted by Sias (2005), Van Vuuren, de Jong and Seydel (2007) shows that the quality of communication and information that subordinates received from their supervisor could be a mechanism underlying the LMX–outcomes link.

Recent research, suggests the relationships between LMX and employee's outcomes are not straight forward. Fix and Sias (2006), for example, found the relationship between LMX and employee job satisfaction a bit more complex. They examined the extent, to which LMX is associated with person-centered communication, which refers to the extent supervisor communicative messages encourages the subordinate to reflect upon the complexities and contingencies in a given situation. These message characteristics are similar to the communication patterns Miles et al. (1996) identified in supervisor–subordinate relationships. Fix and Sias (2006) found when person-centered communication and LMX were both included in a regression model predicting job satisfaction, only person centered communication remained in the model as a significant predictor. Therefore, the Fix and Sias (2006) study indicated that the previously identified association between LMX and employee job satisfaction is likely driven by the communicative messages in supervisor–subordinate relationships.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were employees and their managers working in specific work groups in an organization involved in an airport management services throughout Malaysia. Most of the workgroups consisted of 10 to 12 employees. Each employee directly reported their job progress to the manager on a daily basis. This study excluded managers who had been in their position for less than six months, and employees who had been in their work group for less than three months. This selection rule was intended to ensure employees were sufficiently familiar with their managers so as to have developed exchange relationships with them.

Procedures

Two paper and pencil survey sessions were conducted with the help from the Human Resources Department. The first session employed a manager-report questionnaire which measured individual managers' perceptions of affective group commitment for each subordinate within their workgroup. The second session employed a self-report employee questionnaire on LMX quality and supervisory communication. The two forms of measurement were designed to provide information from managers' and employees' perspectives. Hence, all constructs were measured based on individual perceptions initially. The employee questionnaires were matched to the responses of their managers using a coding system based on information provided by the human resources department. Out of the 174 managers' questionnaires and 524 employee questionnaires distributed, and 72 managers questionnaires (41% response rate) and 201 employee questionnaires (38% response rate) were returned. In the sample of managers 83% ($n = 60$) were male and 17% ($n = 12$) were female. Forty-four percent ($n = 32$) had been employed in the organization for 6–8 years, and 56% ($n = 40$) worked more than 10 years in this organization. Among the employees in the sample 72% ($n = 144$) are male and 28% ($n = 57$) were female. Approximately 15% ($n = 30$) participants have worked for the organization for 3–6 years, 55.2% ($n = 110$) worked for 6–10 years, and 34.8% ($n = 70$) worked more than 10 years in this organization. Approximately 16% ($n = 32$) of participants had worked for their current managers for 3–5 years, 54% ($n = 108$) worked for 6–8 years, and 30% ($n = 61$) had worked for 9–11 years under their current manager. On average, three to four subordinates are overseen by each supervisor.

Instruments

The English language version of LMX by Liden and Graen (1980) and Liden and Maslyn (1998), and supervisory communication by Miles et al. (1996) and commitment by Meyer and Allen (1991) were used to obtain the data. This follows the preference of other researchers who have also used English language questionnaires instead of other local languages for Malaysian subjects (Bochner,

1994; Furnham & Muhiudeen, 1984; Schumaker & Barraclough, 1989). The reason is that Malaysians, especially those involved in the business sector, are fluent in the English language (Lim, 2001). Details of the instruments used in this study are as follows:

LMX. We measured perceptions of relationship quality LMX scale developed by Liden and Maslyn (1998) known as LMX-MDM ($\alpha = .83$).

Supervisory communication. To measure supervisory communication we used Miles et al.'s (1996) 24 items. These items represent eight types of messages developed by Huseman, Hatfield, Boulton and Gatewood (1980) consisting of four dimensions namely the positive relationships communication ($\alpha = .84$), upward openness communication ($\alpha = .82$), negative relationships communication ($\alpha = .81$) and job-relevant communication ($\alpha = .86$).

Perceived employee commitment to workgroup. The managers completed the 6-items ($\alpha = .82$) assessing their subordinates' affective commitment to the group. In doing this we included the subordinate name in the questionnaire, accordingly the managers can assess each of her or his subordinate's commitment to the team. The group commitment items were selected from Meyer and Allen (1991) affective commitment scale and modified by Ellemers, Gilder and Heuvel (1998) to assess employees' commitment to their work group. According to Chan (1998), specifying the appropriate composition model is essential for multilevel research. Composition models define the relationships among variables at different level of analysis that concern fundamentally the same content but are qualitatively different. As a result, this study employed the referent-shift consensus composition model because we were interested in individual aggregate of commitment. The group commitment was specifically designed for the purpose this referent shift, with the collective entity being the focal point.

All these items were measured and operationalized using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables appear in Table 1. Prior to conducting our tests of the hypothesis, data are also tested for coding/data entry errors, and tests for normality are conducted for each of the survey items as well as the constructs that are created by computing individual items. Tests for normality include kurtosis measures, skewness measures, and visual inspection of histograms. The majority of items appear to be within normality. We also performed a principal component factor analysis, which showed that each of our variables represents separate constructs.

Latent composite structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized mediation model. This approach is preferred over a regression suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) because SEM approach allows for the estimation of measurement error (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Both measurement and structural models were tested with AMOS 5.0. Model fit was assessed with fit indices

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. LMX-MDM	3.84	.67	–					
2. Positive relationships communication	4.01	.48	.61**	–				
3. Upward openness communication	4.06	.62	.59**	.36*	–			
4. Negative relationships communication	4.40	.79	–.30**	–.25**	–.26**	–		
5. Job relevant communication	4.34	.51	.55**	.49*	.70**	.72**	–	
6. Group commitment	3.82	.76	.52**	.36**	.66**	.56**	–.27**	–

** $p < .05$.

recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). We assessed mediation with SEM application of Baron and Kenny's (1986) casual steps approach and bootstrap procedure in mediation variables analysis proposed by Shrout and Bolger (2002) to compliment Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure by estimating the direct and indirect effects of mediation variables on independent and dependent variables link. The magnitude of mediation effects was assessed with direct effect procedure. In addition a bootstrap procedure was conducted to estimate the indirect effect of mediation variables.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to determine the validity of our hypothesized factor model as compared to other underlying plausible factor models based on several fit indices. The chi-square and fit indices were $\chi^2 = 120.74$, $p = .088$ $df = 196$, CFI = .99, NFI = .99, RMSEA = .03 (CI: .00 to .04). The results provide evidence for the distinctiveness of the construct in this study and suggest that common method variance was not responsible between the constructs (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). Based on our confirmatory factor analysis, we included only items that load and are statistically significant ($p < .001$, see Table 2). For the LMX-MDM items, we aggregate the scores of 12 items when testing our mediation models, consistent with the approach used by Sparrowe, Soetjito and Kraimer (2006). To justify the appropriateness of the aggregating group commitment as group-level construct, we have evaluated within and between analysis (WABA) variability of affective group commitment. WABA is performed to test whether the total deviation scores for each variable are better presented by within cell or between cell scores. Our analyses suggest that the variation between groups is significantly larger than the within-group variation. Therefore, each person is assigned one score on affective commitment.

Testing for Mediation

We analyzed the mediation model based on LMX-MDM. To verify our hypothesis, SEM was employed. Table 3 shows the Baron and Kenny's (1986) casual steps approach to test mediation based on the LMX-MDM construct. Table 3 shows the

Table 2 Standardized factor loadings for the latent constructs ($N = 196$)

Indicator	Factor loading
<i>LMX MDM ($\alpha = .94$)</i>	
I like my superior very much as a person	.82*
I think my superior is the kind of person I would like to have as a friend	.88*
I think my superior is a lot of fun to work with	.83*
I think my superior defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question	.80*
I think my superior would defend me if I were "attacked" by others	.80*
I think my superior would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake	.83*
I carry out work tasks for my superior that go beyond what is specified in my job description	.87*
I am willing to apply extra effort, beyond that normally required, to further the interest of the work group	.87*
I do not mind working my hardest for my superior	.86*
I am impressed with my superior's knowledge of their job	.84*
I respect my superior's knowledge of and competency on the job	.88*
I admire my superior's professional skills	.90*
<i>Positive relationship communication ($\alpha = .86$)</i>	
I think that my superior jokes good-naturedly with me	.21
I think that my superior asks for my suggestions about how each work task could be done	.72*
I think my superior asks me about my interests outside of work	.89*
I think my superior seeks my input on important decisions	.13
I think my superior strikes up casual conversations with me	.87*
I think my superior asks me for suggestions for improvements in my group	.88*
<i>Upward openness communication ($\alpha = .88$)</i>	
I question my superior's instructions when I don't understand them	.90*
I tell my superior when I think things are being done wrong	.95*
I question my superior's instructions when I think they are wrong	.88*
I make suggestion to my superior about how work could be done	.83*
I think my superior asks for my suggestion about how work tasks could be done	.42
I tell my superior about my work problems	.35
<i>Negative relationship communication ($\alpha = .87$)</i>	
I think my superior ridicules or make fun of me	.65*
I think my superior criticizes my work in front of others	.72*
I think my superior is critical of me as a person	.27
I think my superior's asks me to do thing rather than tells me	.13
I think my superior tells me how they disciplines workers	.33
I think my superior admits to their mistakes	.89*
<i>Job-relevant communication ($\alpha = .88$)</i>	
I think my superior gives me recognition for good work	.89*
I think my superior lets me know why changes are made in work assignments	.85*
I think my superior keeps me informed about rules and policies	.82*
I think my superior gives clear instructions to me	.28
I think my superior informs me about future plan for me in the group	.38
I think my superior tells me the reasons for work schedules	.31

Table 2 (Continued)

Indicator	Factor loading
<i>Group commitment</i> ($\alpha = .85$)	
My subordinate prepared to do additional tasks, when this benefits my team	.90*
My subordinate feels at home among my team member at work	.88*
My subordinate tries to invest effort into a good atmosphere in my team	.92*
I let my subordinate be guided by the goals of my team	.75*
When there is social activity with my team, my subordinate usually helps to organize it	.35
My subordinate thinks that they could easily become as attached to my team	.60*

All factor loadings are significant at $p < .001$.

causal steps to approach test mediation. Figure 1 shows significant direct effect of: (a) supervisor-subordinate relationship quality on positive relationship communication ($\beta = .60, p < .01$), upward openness communication ($\beta = .77, p < .01$), negative relationship communication ($\beta = -.42, p < .01$) and job-relevant communication ($\beta = .43, p < .01$), and (b) positive relationship communication ($\beta = .72, p < .01$), upward openness communication ($\beta = .55, p < .01$) and job-relevant communication ($\beta = .72, p < .01$) on group commitment. Finally, containing the constrained path, an acceptable fit was generated, $\chi^2 = 6.28, p > .001, df = 196, GFI = .95, RMSEA = .06, AGFI = .92, CFI = .96$ and $NFI = .91$ which is consistent with Hu and Bentler's (1999) guidelines. While, the direct effect of LMX-MDM on group commitment decreased but did not turn to 0 (direct effect without mediator ($\beta = .38, p < .01$); direct effect with mediator ($\beta = .17, p < .01$)) also suggesting only partial mediation of the model.

In the model, 67.8% of variance in group commitment was accounted for by LMX-MDM, positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication. The bootstrap procedures based on 19 iterations that generate the direct, total, and indirect effects are featured in Table 4. Table 4 shows a comparison of the direct effect ($\beta = .17$) with the total effect of LMX based on the LMX-MDM scale on group commitment (sum of direct and indirect effects $\beta = .21$) showed that 86.95% was accounted for by LMX-MDM alone, with the remaining

Table 3 Fit indexes for LMX-MDM, positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, negative relationship communication, job-relevant communication, and group commitment

Model	df	$\chi^2 (p)$	GFI	RMSEA	AGFI	CFI	NFI
LMX-MDM, supervisory communication and group commitment	196	6.28 (.063)	.95	.06	.92	.96	.91

Note. GFI = goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error for approximation; AGFI = Adjusted goodness of fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; NFI = Normed Fit Index.

* $p < .01$.

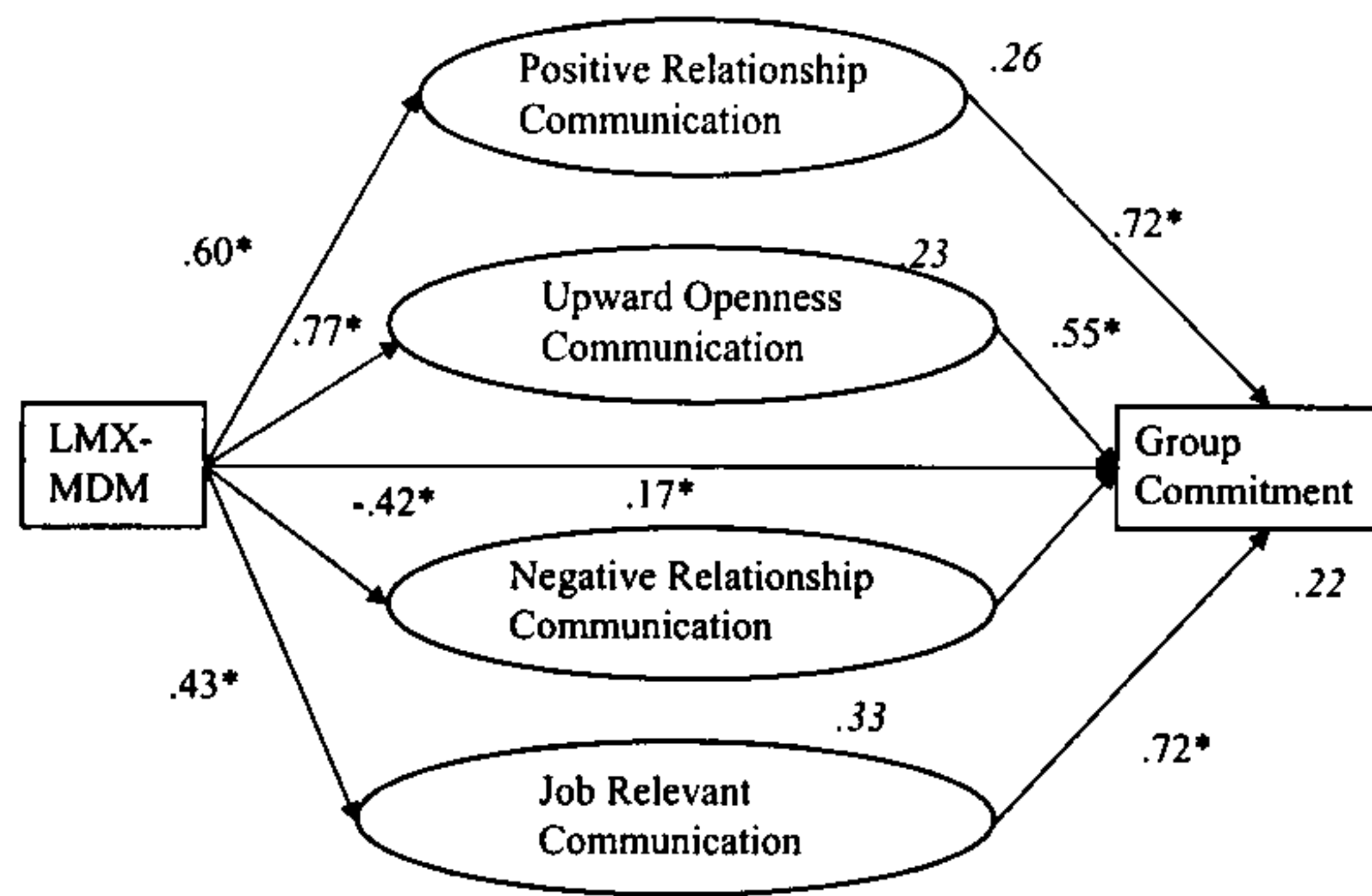


Figure 1 Path coefficient for mediation model with LMX-MDM. Path coefficients are standardized regression coefficients. Values in italics are residuals. * $p < .01$.

13.05% being mediated by positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication. The indirect effect of LMX on group commitment also was significant ($\beta = .04$, $B = .01$, $p < .05$), and the 90% CI was for the unstandardized indirect effect ranged from .003 to .068. Therefore, positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication exerted a relatively small mediating influence on the relationship between LMX and group commitment.

Discussion

Implications for Theory and Research

Our findings contribute to the literature on interpersonal exchange relationships in several ways. First, as Sparrowe and Liden (1997, 2005), suggest, although the implications of LMX for subordinates' perceptions of relationship development with other team members have been explicit in literature, they have not been empirically tested in a systematic manner (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This study provides empirical information to integrate LMX and supervisory communication in organizations by developing and testing a multilevel model using SEM and WABA. Our results provide support for the hypothesized relationships in the model. Specifically, LMX was found to be significantly related to supervisory communication. We have shown that supervisory communication relates to group commitment and also mediates the LMX–group commitment relationship. The overall findings have substantial implications for advancing research on LMX, supervisory communication, and work group.

Table 4 Direct, Total and Indirect Effects of Variable in the Mediation Model Based on LMX-MDM Scale

	LMX-MDM	Positive relationship communication	Upward openness communication	Negative relationship communication	Job-relevant communication
<i>Direct effects</i>					
Positive relationship communication	.72/.60 (.054,.257)				
Upward openness communication	1.22/.77 (.202,.789)				
Negative relationship communication	-.48/-.42 (.042, .164)				
Job relevant communication	.47/.43 (.257, .862)				
Group commitment	.11/.17 (.074, .179)	.85/.72 (.004, .058)	.74/.55 (.003, .054)		.98/.72 (.004, .079)
<i>Total effects</i>					
Positive relationship communication	.72/.60 (.054,.257)				
Upward openness communication	1.22/.77 (.202,.789)				
Negative relationship communication	-.48/-.42 (.042, .164)				
Job relevant communication	.47/.43 (.257, .862)				
Group commitment	.12/.21 (.062, .151)	.85/.72 (.004, .058)	.74/.55 (.003, .054)		.98/.72 (.004, .079)
<i>Indirect effects</i>					
Positive relationship communication					
Upward openness communication					
Negative relationship communication					
Job relevant communication					
Group commitment	.01/.04 (.003, .068)	.85/.72 (.004, .058)	.74/.55 (.003, .054)		.98/.72 (.004, .079)

Note. The first value is the unstandardized effect. The second value is the standardized effect. Values in parentheses are the 90% confidence intervals for the unstandardized effects. $p < .01$ for all effects.

Second, our findings provide important implications from the mediation effects of supervisory communication practices on the relationship between LMX and group commitment. Communication researchers such as Sias (2005) and Jablin (1979) suggest that supervisor-subordinate communication can represent and help a social system in organizations through linking formal and informal information, as well as vertical and horizontal relationships at work group. Currently, research on workplace

relationships has focused on identifying individual and contextual factors that influence the development of such relationships (Sias & Cahill, 1998, Sias, 2005, 2009). Sias (2005) and Fix and Sias (2006) indicate that person-centered communication and information quality remained as a significant predictor compared to LMX when they are analyzed together, suggesting employee job satisfaction is likely driven primarily by the communicative dimensions in supervisor–subordinate relationships. However, none of these studies have explicitly examined the mediating effects of supervisory communication as we did in this study. In this study, we took a step forward by addressing both issues through our exploration of the role of supervisory communication in the LMX–group commitment relationship in an attempt to understand the mediating effects within dyadic exchange processes in work groups. Our results add to the emerging body of research on interpersonal relationships in organizations by revealing that LMX is related to supervisory communication and serves as mediator influencing the relationship. High-quality LMX relationships can be seen by subordinates as an indicator to their perceptions of high quality supervisory communication, which in turn facilitates high affective commitment to, the work group. These results suggest that supervisory communication has the potential to create a social system within a work group that affects behavior and perceptions in larger collectives of workgroups.

Thirdly, although commitment has been studied in the organizational setting (see Ellemers et al., 1999), little attention has been directed toward the affective commitment as a group-level construct with implications from supervisor–subordinate relationships and communication at an individual level. The SEM and WABA analysis provide evidence supporting the hypothesized relationships at the individual level and the group level that is that supervisory communication practices have partial effect on the relations between LMX and group commitment. However, only positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication mediates partially the link between LMX and group commitment. These results suggest that the quality of communication and information through positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication that subordinate reported receiving from their supervisor is the mechanism underlying the LMX–outcomes link as suggested by Sias (2005). Therefore, based on these studies, subordinate communication experience with their supervisor mediates the relationship between LMX and group commitment. Although quality of relationships is important in affecting subordinate commitment to their work group, communication with their supervisor is salient with respect to subordinate commitment to their work group. Our findings also support the proposition by communication scholars that the dyadic communication within a group does affect the overall group behavior (Kacmar et al., 2003; Kramer, 2004; Lee, 2005).

Finally, the mediation effects also have implications for the interpretation of many commitment studies that have tested direct effects between LMX and work outcomes while excluding mediators such as supervisory communication (Kacmar et al., 2003). Our results indicate that supervisory communication not only have direct effects on

commitment but also indirect effects that are partially mediated by positive relationship communication, upward openness communication, and job-relevant communication of supervisor communication practices. Results of the current investigations also support the description on Malaysian respondents in Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (Kennedy, 2002). In the GLOBE study, it was noted that Malaysian employees prefer to work as a group rather than individually and place a high value on interpersonal communication and relationships. The results of the current investigations indicate that the supervisory communication practices partially mediate the relationship between LMX and group commitment.

The main strengths of this investigation are the diversity of the sample and independent source and method for the assessment of LMX, supervisory communication practices, and commitment. Few empirical investigations of leader–member relationships and communication that combined simultaneous examination of the direct and indirect effect outcomes of LMX and supervisory communication practices, especially studies that include data collected from multiple sources as in our study is rare. Our investigations show that in a Malaysian organization, the relations between LMX that is measured through LMX-MDM and group commitment are influenced by communication quality between supervisor and their subordinates.

Implications for Practices

There are several practical implications for managers and organizations. First, the present study develops upon the notion that LMX quality can potentially influence the development of group commitment through supervisory communication. The quality of communication and the information subordinates receive from their supervisor may be more than a passing fad. High-quality communication and information that subordinates receive from their supervisor may result in the subordinate having a higher commitment to the group.

Second, supervisory communication develops to complement relationships with the immediate supervisor in the determination of commitment to the work group. In addition, the positive influence of LMX and supervisory communication on group commitment point to persistent efforts intended to improve group process and interaction. As noted by Dansereau and Markham (1987), this finding implies that fostering a healthy supervisory communication context helps employees understand that they are not in isolation in a workgroup, because supervisory communication would affect their interpretations and expectations of their experiences of high-quality supervisor–subordinate relationships. This, in turn, determines their attitudes and behaviors toward work group. Hence, managers can use supervisory communication as a mechanism to guide and educate their employees about how the organization cares for their well-being and foster commitment among employees at work.

Finally, our findings reveal that specific supervisory communication characteristics are a driving force in the formation of group commitment. Specifically, supervisors need to pay attention to their subordinates' perceptions of the supervisory

communication characteristics and to reciprocate in ways that meet their subordinates' communication expectations. Effective managers should attempt to stimulate subordinates' shared perceptions regarding affective commitment and to promote effective supervisory communication within work groups.

Limitations and Future Directions

Perhaps the main weakness of this study is the focus of commitment. Current investigations limit themselves to group commitment. Thus, we do not know if supervisory communication practices will mediate the relationships between LMX and other types of commitment such as organizational commitment or commitment to their respective supervisor. It would be desirable for future studies combining commitment to organization and supervisor. Secondly, the current investigation was limited to only Malaysian respondents. As mentioned earlier, current description on Malaysian respondents justify the mediation role of supervisory communication practices on LMX–group commitment relationships. Therefore, a comparison study between high and low context culture on the current mediation model should be considered.

Finally, in order to continue providing knowledge useful for managers, researchers must continue their efforts to identify specific communication behaviors within supervisor–subordinate relationship that mediate the influence LMX have on work outcome. A key limitation on this report is the cross-sectional nature of the data. Clearly, longitudinal research that tracks relationship development and communication activities within and between dyad is needed. Likewise, the use of self-report methods and the homogenous sample warrants caution. The dyad represented in this report may under-represent the actual dyad population at large. In addition, statements of causality based on the results of statistical techniques are useful for making inferences, such as multiple regressions and SEM, but must be treated with caution, given the correlational nature of the data.

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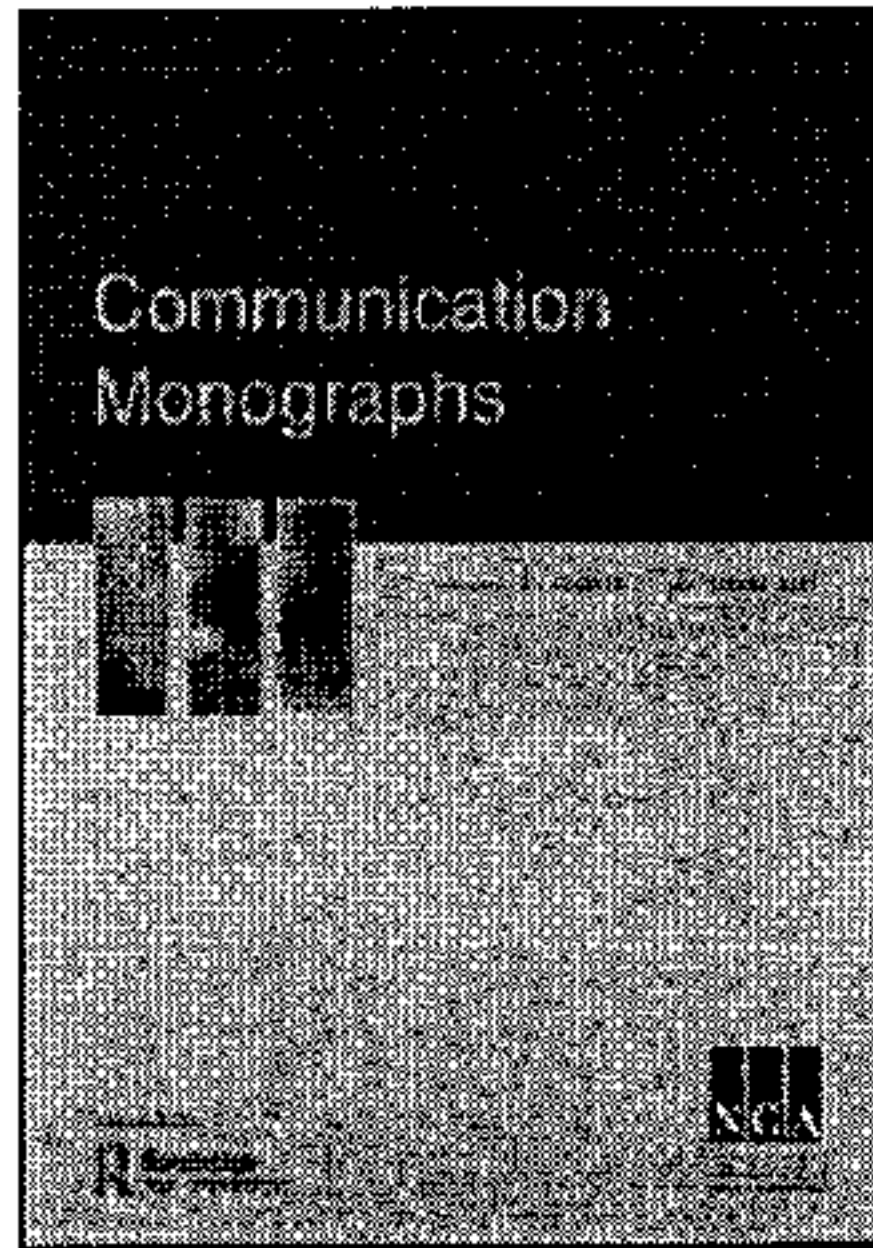
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Mediating Role of Supervisory Communication Practices on Relations Between Leader-Member Exchange and Perceived Employee Commitment to Workgroup

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Online publication date: 02 December 2010

To cite this Article Abu Bakar, Hassan , Dilbeck, Keith E. and McCroskey, James C.(2010) 'Mediating Role of Supervisory Communication Practices on Relations Between Leader-Member Exchange and Perceived Employee Commitment to Workgroup', *Communication Monographs*, 77: 4, 637 – 656

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/03637751.2010.499104

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2010.499104>

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