

Full Length Research Paper

The moderating role of leader-member exchange in the relationship between psychological contract violation and organizational citizenship behavior

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This paper aims to explore the moderating role of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) quality in the relationship between Psychological Contract Violation (PCV) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Data were gathered from a sample of 148 registered nurses working in a private general hospital. Results show that the negative relationship between PCV and OCB is stronger for nurses who have high LMX quality. Therefore, the study implies that the interaction of the behavior of all organizational agents and supervisors relates to OCB.

Key words: Organizational citizenship behavior, psychological contract violation, leader-member exchange quality.

INTRODUCTION

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) can contribute to organizational effectiveness and success in many ways (Chu et al., 2005; George and Bettenhausen, 1990; Karambayya, 1990; MacKenzie et al., 1991; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994, 1997; Smith et al., 1983). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) represents individual behavior that is discretionary, that is, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate, promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988, 1997). A group of researchers have argued that exchange based frameworks may provide deep understanding in explaining OCB (Organ, 1990; Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Rousseau, 1995). Accordingly, employees' engagement in OCB can be explained by Psychological Contract theory (PC), which is one of the exchange based

frame Psychological Contract theory (PC), when employees perceive that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligations, they also perceive a psychological contract breach (Rousseau, 1995). This perception can engender intense emotional reactions and may result in Psychological Contract Violation (PCV) (Guillard-Peyrat, 2008), which can be characterized by frustration and anger (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). PCV negatively affects OCB (Robinson and Morrison, 1995). Despite the fact that PCV and OCB occur essentially as a result of the relationship between the organization and employee, their relationship may also be affected by other factors. Since an organization communicates and negotiates through its agents, who are generally employees' direct supervisors, it will be meaningful to expect that the quality of the relationship between employee and supervisor may affect this relationship. Hence, the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) quality, which explores the quality of exchange between employee and supervisor, may play an important role in PCV-OCB relationship. Although, their relationship is well defined in the literature, there is no previous research which addresses the role of LMX in this context. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to explore the moderating role of LMX in the PCV-OCB

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Abbreviations: LMX, Leader-member exchange; PCV, psychological contract violation; OCB, organizational citizenship behavior.

relationship.

Relationship between psychological contract violation and organizational citizenship behavior

OCB represents individual behavior that is discretionary, that is, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate, promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988, 1997). It embodies constructive and cooperative gestures that are neither mandated by formal job-role prescriptions nor directly contractually compensated for by the formal organizational reward system (Allen et al., 2000). Thus, OCB is organizationally desirable and it advances the effective operation of the organization (Organ, 1988; Organ and Konovsky, 1989; Paine and Organ, 2000) due to the fact that an organization's ability to elicit employee behavior that exceeds the call of duty can be a key asset and one that is difficult for competitors to imitate (Bolino and Turnley, 2003). Previous research argues that OCB can contribute to organizational effectiveness and success in many ways, such as increasing co-worker and managerial productivity (Barksdale and Werner, 2001; Chu et al., 2005; MacKenzie et al., 1991; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1994, 1997), reducing the need to devote scarce resources to purely maintenance functions, helping to coordinate the activities of work groups (Karambayya, 1990; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1997; Smith et al., 1983) and enhancing the organization's ability to attract and retain the most effective staff (George and Bettenhausen, 1990; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff and MacKenzie, 1997).

Research on OCB has produced a literature large enough to yield a comprehensive meta-analysis (Organ and Ryan, 1995) that confirms OCB's significant relationships with particular dispositional factors such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, positive and negative affectivity, as well as, with particular situational factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and leader consideration. Konovsky and Organ (1996) further added equity sensitivity and fairness as dispositional and situational factors, respectively. These factors have been identified by scholars to better understand and stimulate OCB in organizations. In addition to the above mentioned factors, exchange-based frameworks may provide a deeper understanding of extra-role behaviors like OCB (Organ, 1990; Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Rousseau, 1995). In this context, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961), which posits that employees are motivated to seek a fair and balanced relationship among themselves and with their organizations, can contribute in understanding the dynamics of employees' tendency to show OCB. From this point of view, social exchange relations are compromised of the voluntary actions in which each party engages with the expectation that the other will in some way reciprocate those actions (Blau,

1964). Coyle-Shapiro (2002) supports this argument and states that since situational factors may limit employees' responses to employer treatment in the context of in-role performance; they may show responses in the context of extra-role behaviors. In other words, when perceived employer treatment meets the expectations, employees may be willing to reciprocate and engagement in OCB may increase. However, if perceived employer treatment falls below expectations, employees may show a negative response by not engaging in OCB. Thus, OCB has its foundation in exchange-based frameworks. One particular framework that may help to explain OCB is PC (Robinson and Morrison, 1995).

Psychological Contract (PC), which is derived from the social exchange theory and the norm of the reciprocity (Guillard-Peyrat, 2008), helps to define the relationship between employees and organizations (Rousseau, 1989; Suazo et al., 2005). When an employee perceives that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligations, the employee experiences psychological contract breach (Rousseau, 1995), which is the employee's cognition of receiving less than what was promised (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Robinson and Morrison, 1995). When these perceptions engender intense emotional reactions, they may cause a psychological contract violation (Guillard-Peyrat, 2008), which can be characterized by frustration and anger (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Previous research identifies that OCB correlates negatively with PCV due to the fact that emotions serve as an adaptive function and act to formulate the intention to engage in certain behaviors at a subsequent time (Spector and Fox, 2002). Negative emotional responses reduce the willingness to engage in OCB, while positive emotional responses increase it. Rousseau (1989) states that a condition for employees behaving as good citizens is that they should feel respected, otherwise, PCV will occur and feelings of deception and betrayal may adversely affect employees' behaviors. In other words, employees who feel that the organization has violated the contract will try to reciprocate by reducing contributions to the organization (Robinson and Morrison, 1995). Consistent with the above arguments, the literature contains an extensive body of research which empirically shows that psychological contract framework can be a good predictor of OCB (Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Van Dyne and Ang, 1998).

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As Marks (2001) argues, unlike an employment contract, informal communication and implicit contracting processes enact a psychological contract. Since the organization as a collective entity is not itself able to

negotiate or communicate, the organization does so through its agents. Employees often view their direct supervisors as the chief agent and the personification of the organization's commitment to them (Levinson, 1965; Rousseau, 1995; Shore and Tetrick, 1994). Drawing on this idea, the dyadic relationship between the supervisor and the employee, namely the LMX quality, may alter the perceptions of the employee regarding the psychological contract between the employee and the organization. Thus, the LMX quality may have a moderating effect on the relationship between PCV and OCB as explained in detail below.

The LMX model posits that leaders' behaviors are not necessarily consistent across all subordinates (Aryee and Chen, 2006; Lee et al., 2007). It is generally considered that managers and supervisors develop close relationships with only a few subordinates and these relationships are characterized by high quality exchanges (high level of LMX quality) (Ellemers et al., 2004; Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). Such exchanges are characterized by mutual trust, respect and obligation (Graen and Schieman, 1978; Graen et al., 1982a b), by positive support, common bonds, open communication, shared loyalty (Dansereau et al., 1975; Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and affection (Liden et al., 1993). Thus, a higher-quality rather than lower-quality relationship seems likely to result in a higher level of communication concerning reciprocal obligations between the manager and employee, which in turn, will tend to enhance the level of agreement on these obligations (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Tekleab and Taylor, 2003). However, in the case of the relationship between PCV and OCB, LMX quality may accentuate the effect of violation on OCB. The decision to engage in or withhold this discretionary behavior depends on the organization's treatment of the individual (Organ, 1988, 1990). Therefore, a basic premise of the theory is that employees will either engage in OCB to reciprocate the organization for fair treatment or withhold it should the organization fail to provide adequate inducements, in other words, violate the psychological contract (Organ, 1990). Although, a psychological contract, as was mentioned before, is something attributed to the whole organization, the supervisor is mainly responsible for enacting it. However, there are other agents of the organization, such as top management and human resource (HR) professionals, that have effects on the psychological contract (Turnley and Feldman, 1999) and the supervisor's behavior may not be prototypical of the organization as a whole. On the other hand, employees who have high quality relationships with leaders have correspondingly high expectations of their treatment by the organization and its agents (Piccolo et al., 2008). These expectations are likely to make PCV more salient, such that high expectations regarding how they should be treated will make followers more sensitive to experiences of violation. This sensitivity may result in more severe

effects of violation on OCB for employees who have higher quality LMX compared to those with lower quality. Based on the above arguments, there is an expectation that the level of LMX quality may affect the relationship between PCV and OCB. Although, the PCV-OCB relationship is well defined in the literature, there is no previous research which addresses the role of LMX in this context. Within this framework, the aim of this paper is to explore the moderating effect of LMX on the PCV-OCB relationship, as shown by the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS

The level of LMX quality moderates the relationship between PCV and OCB.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and procedure

The data analyzed in this study were collected from nurses working in a Turkish private general hospital established in 2002, with a 121-bed capacity, eight operating rooms and 21 intensive care units. Although, relatively new, it has become one of the leading hospitals in the region among those providing care in almost all fields of health. The hospital follows a hiring policy based on recruiting younger rather than more experienced nurses and training them according to the institution's own rules and procedures. Hence, only the nurses in supervisory positions are older and more experienced.

A survey was prepared and sent to the board of directors of the hospital for approval, after which copies were placed in envelopes and distributed to the nurses. In a cover letter, they were assured that the data collected would be confidential and their identities would not be disclosed. They were also asked to return the surveys in a sealed envelope. Over a period of two weeks, a total of 148 nurses completed the questionnaire, resulting in an 87% response rate. All respondents were female with ages ranging from 18 to 47 years, averaging 27 years ($SD = 4.35$). Their occupational experience ranged from one to 27 years, with an average of five years ($SD = 4.61$). Among the respondents, 37.5% were high school graduates, 9.5% were vocational school graduates, 50.7% were university graduates and 2.1% held Master's degrees.

Measures

Leader-member exchange quality

The quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship was assessed using the seven-item measure of leader-member exchange (LMX-7) developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). Each item uses a five-point Likert scale. In their meta-analysis, Gerstner and Day (1997) indicated that LMX-7 has the soundest psychometric properties of all instruments. The coefficient alpha obtained for this measure in the present study was 0.85.

Psychological contract violation

The scale developed by Robinson and Morrison (2000) was used to measure PCV. It contained four items and each was assessed with a five-point Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.87.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables^a.

Key variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Psychological contract violation	1.00	4.25	1.82	0.77			
2. Leader-member exchange quality	1.57	5.00	3.89	0.66	-0.38**		
3. Organizational citizenship behavior	1.20	5.00	4.04	0.74	-0.27**	0.30**	

^an varies between 135 and 146 due to pair wise deletion of missing variables. ** p< 0.01

Table 2. Results of hierarchical regression analysis with OCB as the dependent variable (n = 134).

Step and variable	Organizational citizenship behavior					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Beta	t-value	Beta	t-value	Beta	t-value
1. Psychological contract violation	-0.27**	-3.20**	-0.19*	-2.06*	-0.23*	-2.55*
2. Leader-member exchange quality			0.20*	2.26*	0.21*	2.33*
3. Psychological contract violation x leader-member exchange quality					-0.21*	-2.49*
Model F	(1, 133) 10.23**		(2, 132) 7.82**		(3, 131) 7.48**	
Total R ²	0.07		0.11		0.15	
R ²	0.07**		0.04*		0.04*	

*p< 0.05.

Organizational citizenship behavior

In previous research, supervisor and self-ratings were both used to measure OCB. However, the use of self-ratings was preferred based on the proposition by Pond et al. (1997) who state that "OCB should be measured by self-report ratings so that the measure reflects the perceptions, dispositions and cognitions of the employee rather than those of his or her supervisor". Thus, OCB was measured with five items and a five-point Likert scale was used in assessing it, thereby capturing the dimensions of interpersonal helping, individual initiative, personal industry and loyal boosterism, as outlined by Moorman and Blakely (1995). Based on the findings and recommendations of Lepine et al. (2002), these items were aggregated to create an overall measure of OCB. A coefficient alpha of .85 was obtained for this measure in the present study.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and correlations for key variables are presented in Table 1, with higher scores indicating higher levels of LMX quality, OCB and PCV. According to the hierarchical regression results summarized in Table 2, the interaction term between PCV and LMX quality explained a significant increase in variance in OCB (R² = .04, F(1, 131) = 6.19, p < .05). Thus, LMX is a significant moderator of the relationship between PCV and OCB lending support to the hypothesis of the study.

The moderating effect of LMX in the relationship between PCV and OCB is demonstrated in Figure 1. Particularly at high levels of LMX quality, PCV-OCB relationship is stronger when compared to lower levels of

LMX quality.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the moderating effect of LMX in the relationship between PCV and OCB. Although, OCB literature outlines that PC framework could be utilized to explain employees' engagement in OCB, there was no empirical evidence to show how LMX quality affected this relationship. Accordingly, through identifying the moderating effect of LMX on the relationship, a gap in PCV, OCB and LMX literature was addressed.

The study's findings suggest that the level of LMX quality moderates the relationship between PCV and OCB. When the level of LMX quality is high, the relationship between PCV and OCB will be stronger. In other words, when in-group members experience PCV, they show their responses by sharply reducing their OCB. Consequently, this finding contributes to the literature, where the large majority of research on the concept has concentrated on its positive outcomes rather than its negative effects (Brouer and Harris, 2007), by showing that increase in LMX quality does not necessarily create favorable outcomes. On the other hand, when in-group members perceive that their expectations are met by the organization, they show higher levels of OCB. This finding is consistent with the previous research, which indicates that employees in relationships of mutual trust

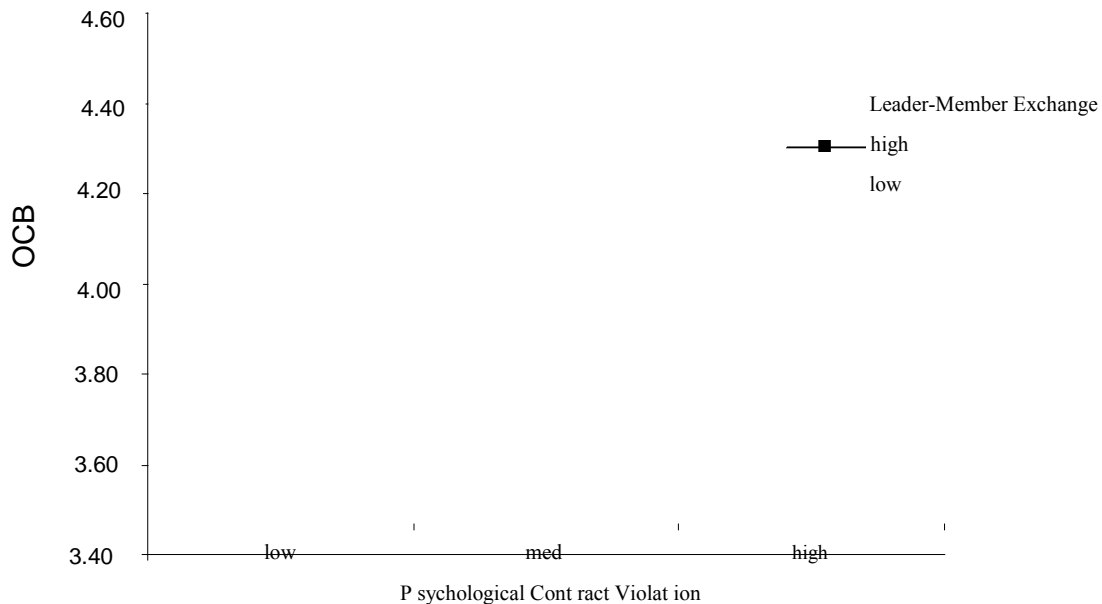


Figure 1. The relationship between PCV and OCB for high and low levels of LMX.

Practical implications

Results of the research offer important managerial implications. First of all, it highlights the importance of PCV in influencing OCB. Organizations are able to reduce the likelihood of experiencing PCV by meeting employees' expectations such as providing equal treatment, respect and career opportunities. Hence, consistent with previous research (Robinson and Morrison, 1995), this study emphasizes the responsibility of organizations in increasing employees' citizenship behaviors.

Furthermore, results emphasize the supervisors' role in PCV and OCB relationship. Although, equal and respectful treatment of the organizations stimulates employees' engagement in OCB, a supervisor can further strengthen this effect. In other words, through developing high quality relationships with subordinates, supervisors can increase the positive effect created by the organizations and stimulate OCB.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has a number of limitations due to correlational data that precludes causal inferences. This is due to the self-report measures used. Moreover, the fact that the sample was limited to a single hospital means the study results have a limited scope. However, the findings of the study suggest that LMX quality is worth considering as a moderating variable. Therefore, conducting future

research on a larger scale by overcoming these limitations is meaningful.

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