

**A MODEL FOR INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE ON EMPLOYEES' AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT IN SAUDI UNIVERSITIES**

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**Abstract :** Employee's emotional attachment to their workplaces (referred to as affective commitment) plays crucial roles in their long-term performance and interactions. The literature on employee commitment to their works advances several factors that explain the nature, directions, and implications of employees' affective commitment. However, most of these studies were carried out within private industrial settings. Relatively few of such studies investigate leader-member exchange (LMX) as a multi-dimensional antecedent to employees' affective commitment in knowledge-intensive industry context such as the academia. Specifically, relatively few studies were done that were grounded on established empirical literature and sound theoretical grids investigate about the influences of employees' affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect on the affective commitment. In this paper therefore, we traced the multi-dimensional LMX antecedents of the affective commitment of administrative employees in Saudi Arabian Universities and then develop a model for investigating the impact in such relationship between these two important variables.

**Keywords:** LMX, affect, commitment, affective commitment, university employees.

**INTRODUCTION**

Education is the basis of the renaissance of nations; because of this, the government of Saudi Arabia has granted particular focus on this area. The Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia was established in 1975 to regulate higher education policies and impose a long-term master plan for higher education. The Ministry of Higher Education plays an active role that may contribute to the country's social, economic, and cultural development (Alsubaihi, 2016). Furthermore, higher education universities play an important role in the growth of societies (Alharthi *et al.*, 2017). As with commercial organisations nowadays, universities have become more dependent on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and internet-based services to provide their stakeholders with the requested educational services (MOE, 2017). Saudi Arabian universities have been training their employees to use technology in achieving administrative tasks, which meeting with Saudi 2030 vision in developing the educational sector in the country.

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**Definitions of Leader-Member Exchange**

This study will focus on affective commitment only. This is due to that affective commitment refers to an emotional attachment to an organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991) and requires congruency between the individual’s values and goals and those of the organization. Loyalty to the organization forms when individuals identify with the values and goals of the organization, feel that they are part of the organization, prize membership of the organization and feel that the organization is committed to them (O’reilly & Chatman, 1986; Shore & Tetrick, 1991).

Researchers found affective commitment as the most beneficial (i.e. employee are less likely to leave, be absent and are more accepting of change). Affective commitment facilitates in creating a strong belief in and acceptance of the goals and values of an organisation (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). The reasons of its importance can be explored from two perspectives – collectivistic values and macro- economic conditions (Jain, 2016). Commitment in the workplace can take various forms and, arguably, have the potential to influence organizational effectiveness and employee well-being (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Commitment can be defined as a stabilizing or obliging force that gives direction to behaviour (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001).

Affective commitment is positively related to lower levels of absenteeism. Employees with high affective commitment tend to work harder and perform better than those with weak commitment. Moreover, employees with high affective commitment show more pro-social/citizenship behaviours. Such behaviours will include extra help for colleagues, volunteering for special or additional work, giving extra attention to colleagues and customers, participating and being involved in the organisation and making suggestions (voice). Affective commitment seems to be associated with loyalty and a lack of withdrawal from, and neglect of the organisation. Levels of stress associated with change situations can be mediated if an employee has high levels of affective commitment. Affective commitment plays an important role in this study, as it will be investigated as an outcome of LMX.

**Definitions of Leader-Member Exchange**

LMX refers to the high-quality relationship between supervisor and employees, who is crucial for well-being and performance at work (Gerstner and Day, 1997). According to LMX theory (Graen & Schieman, 1978; Dansereau, Cashman, & George, (1973) that supervisors have a unique relationship to each of their employees with high-quality relationships characterised by respect, trust, and mutual obligation (George, Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, the essential aspects of LMX theory are the leader, subordinate, and their relationship with each other.

LMX refers to the quality of the interpersonal relationship between an employee and his/her immediate manager (Chaudhry and Tekleab, 2013). Thus, effective leadership occurs when leaders and followers are able to develop high-quality relationships that result in mutual influence (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The quality of such relationships also determines the impact on the important leader and member outcomes. Based on to LMX theory, the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader and a follower is predictive of outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis (Gerstner and Day, 1997).

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### Dimensions of Leader-Member Exchange

The relationships between leaders and their subordinates in the organisation can be considered either effectual or ineffectual based on specific social exchange dimensions. Therefore, the related researchers conceptualised LMX as multidimensional in nature and suggested several dimensions for the exchange (Bhal and Ansari, 2007). For example, Dienesch and Liden (1996) offered three dimensions of LMX namely affect, loyalty, and contribution. Moreover, along the same lines, professional respect was suggested by Liden and Maslyn (1998) as the fourth dimension of LMX. Therefore, these dimensions have been used as the underlying constructs for measuring the quality of leader-member exchange as well as in this current study. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) & Babic (2014) argued that LMX is comprised of the interrelated dimensions of respect, trust, and mutual obligation.

LMX is multidimensional and it is explained by Liden and Maslyn's (1998). LMX is consisting of four dimensions which are affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect. Liden and Maslyn's (1998); Jing-zhou & Wen-xia (2011) describe multidimensional LMX concepts as following: (1) Affect – described as the interpersonal liking of members in the dyad for each other. This mutual affection is based on interpersonal attraction and excludes feelings of respect for the other members' work or professional values (social currency). (2) Loyalty – expressed by leader and follower through the exhibition of public support for each other. By committing themselves to their leader's goals or visions, followers are demonstrating their loyalty (social currency). (3) Contribution – defined as the extent of work-related efforts which leaders and followers consider they each put into the explicit goals of a dyad (work-related currency). (4) Professional respect – refers to the perception of the degree to which each member of the dyad has built a reputation, within and/or outside the organisation, of excelling at his or her line of work (social currency).

Therefore, this study will investigate LMX in higher education in Saudi Arabia. LMX will be measured as the predictor of affective commitment, and it will be studied based on multidimensional (affect, contribution, loyalty, and professional respect).

### METHODOLOGY

Saudi Arabia, researches of LMX and affective commitment are lacking. The methodological approach taken in this study is a review of literature based on Dube and Pare. In this paper underwent certain strategies and the content was analyzed based on the several techniques. These categories include choosing related studies that are essential to the area of research from online databases, selecting important keywords that identify the related publications, classification of the selected studies, evaluating the relevant articles based on the classification, direction analysis in the study area, and improvement of finding.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

LMX and affective commitment all have a significant positive relationship. The strength of the positive relationship between LMX and affective commitment to the organization increases as perceived organisational support increases (Casimir, Ngee Keith Ng, Yuan Wang and Ooi, 2014). The relationship between leader-member exchange and affective commitment is strong. Leader-member exchange was found to be a perfect predictor and antecedent for

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increasing the affective commitment for followers in the Saudi context (Alshamrani, 2017). The development of high-quality LMX relations could result in organisational unproductive consequences and discrimination against the out-group organization. Unfortunately, in the Saudi context, differentiation of groups could develop not only based on the work but, rather, based on unfair criteria, which are affected by culture. However, leader-member exchange effective predictors increase the level of affective commitment in segregated work environments.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in this study, LMX is the independent variable based on multidimensional (affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect). LMX plays the predicting role of Affective Commitment) in the Saudi Arabian universities. Limited research has examined the relationship between LMX and affective commitment in Saudi Arabia. LMX can resolve conflicts between leaders and followers and increase the affective commitment.

In Saudi Arabia, the government must play the role of helping organisations motivate employees to behave with affective commitment by exploiting their culture and religion for this purpose. Higher education in Saudi Arabia should be offered encouragement for educating the employees on the significance of LMX and affective commitment. We suggest that future research investigate the relationship between LMX and affective commitment in Saudi Arabia using a quantitative method.

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