Personality and Contextual Influence on Team-Member Exchange

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ABSTRACT: *In view of the benefits of team-member exchange (TMX) and the limited studies on its antecedents, the current study examines how propensity to trust, reciprocation wariness, and exchange ideology may impact TMX, and how task interdependence and shared leadership may interact with these personality traits to promote or hinder TMX. This examination provides practitioners with insights on strengthening team members' exchange relationships with appropriate work design. The study further explores how TMX may be associated with work-life balance. Such exploration may suggest practitioners an economical way to help employees achieve a better balance between their work life and family life. A brief outline of the research design is provided.*

Keywords: Team Processes, Job and Work Design, Interpersonal Behavior, Work Performance

Peers make the workplace (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). As Schneider (1987) stated, one's coworkers are also one's partners in social and task interactions and help define the workplace. With the increasing transformation of job content from simple and routine individual tasks to more complicated and collective ones (Harrison, Johns, & Martocchio, 2000), team members' importance and potential influence have gradually been enhanced. This calls for more attention to the relationships among employees. One specific area of coworker relationships is social exchange.

Team-member exchange (TMX) is defined as the willingness of a focal employee to share feedback, information, and other social resources with the team members and how likely he/she will receive such resources in return (Seers, 1989). The extant literature suggests that TMX is beneficial to one's job performance (e.g. Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000; Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995). Yet, we are aware that little research attention has been devoted to the antecedents to coworkers' engagement in social exchange. Without such understanding, practitioners may have a limited idea about how to garner the benefits arising from TMX. As workers inevitably have to work with peers who have different personality traits and personality has been found to predict various organizational attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (e.g. Barrick & Mount, 1991; Kamdar & Van

Dyne, 2007), the current study examines how personality traits may serve as predictors of TMX. Specifically, we focus on three exchange-related personality traits: propensity to trust, reciprocation wariness, and exchange ideology.

By examining the association between personality and TMX, we may understand why some employees are less likely to get involved in social exchange than others. The question that follows is "what can be done then?" Here, we take it one step further to explore how organizational settings may affect the association between personality and TMX. Two contextual features are investigated: task interdependence and shared leadership. This exploration, we believe, is of the utmost importance as it offers practitioners managerial insights. Employers, in most cases, cannot select employees on the basis of personality. If they are aware that certain contextual features may stimulate employees to share and exchange social resources, they can design the work context accordingly. Finally, we explore a new consequence of TMX – work-life balance. A recent meta-analytical study (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008) reveals that coworker support can help enhance one's role perceptions by reducing role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload at work. Also, increasing coworker support reduces one's intention to quit and increases one's organizational citizenship behavior and job performance. It is thus worthwhile to investigate further how TMX may play a role in enhancing work-life balance. The relationships among personality traits, contextual factors, TMX, and work-life balance are depicted in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

PROPOSITIONS

Propensity to Trust – Team-Member Exchange

While trust is essential in high-quality workplace relationships (Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006), not everyone shares the same level of willingness to trust. Propensity to trust represents a person's stable disposition to trust others (Rotter, 1980). A person high in propensity to trust tends to believe that others are trustworthy and can be relied on, and shows a lower tendency to engage in deviate behavior such as lying, cheating and stealing (Rotter, 1980). These features are believed to stimulate social exchange. As social exchange is not bound by any defined terms, one who gives is confronted

with the risk that the exchange partner returns nothing. If one is high in propensity to trust, he/she believes that the exchange partner is trustworthy and is willing to return sometime in the future. For instance, in the workplace, an employee who believes good acts will be reciprocated is willing to offer help to his/her coworkers and tends to believe that one day when he/she needs help, the coworkers will reciprocate. Moreover, because this employee is likely to act in a trustworthy manner and rarely engages in deviant behavior (Rotter, 1980), he/she is willing to close the social exchange loop by offering resources once some are received. Therefore, an employee with high propensity to trust not only is more likely to initiate social exchanges with his/her team members but is also more likely to reciprocate to his/her exchange partners. A recent study suggests that leaders and subordinates with a high propensity to trust tend to generate high-quality leader-member social exchange relationships (Bernerth & Walker, 2009). We posit that the impact of propensity to trust on the establishment of team members' social exchange relationships to be similar.

   Proposition 1 (P1). Propensity to trust is positively associated with TMX.

Reciprocation Wariness – Team-Member Exchange

   Reciprocation wariness is defined as the degree of general fear of being exploited in interpersonal relationships involving reciprocation (Eisenberger, Cotterell, & Marvel, 1987). People who demonstrate a high level of reciprocation wariness are disinclined to accept help because they have strong suspicion of the motives of others' help (Cotterell, Eisenberger, & Speicher, 1992). They also show high hesitancy to repay the help; and when they *do* reciprocate, they tend to be less generous. Apart from the cautiousness in reciprocating aid, because of the fear of exploitation, highly wary individuals are less likely to establish a social relationship by being the first to offer aid. As a consequence, highly wary individuals are perceived to be unhelpful, uncooperative, unresponsive to others' needs, less likable, self-centered, undependable, and concerned almost exclusively with their own well-being only (Cotterell et al., 1992). Since reciprocation is critical to developing, reinforcing, and stabilizing an ongoing relationship between social exchange partners (Blau, 1964), researchers have argued that reciprocation wariness may impede the development of high-quality interpersonal relationships (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Empirical findings have supported this line of reasoning, revealing the inhibiting effects of reciprocation wariness on the establishment, as well as

strengthening, of interpersonal relationships in laboratory and organizational settings (e.g. Cotterell et al., 1992; Shore, Bommer, Rao, & Seo, 2009). Therefore, in work settings, as employees with high reciprocation wariness tend to demonstrate self-protective acts, not only will they try to avoid initiating social exchanges with their team members, but they will also choose to offer minimal reciprocity if any resources such as help or feedback are received from team members.

Proposition 2 (P2). Reciprocation wariness is negatively associated with TMX.

Exchange Ideology – Team-Member Exchange

Although reciprocity is a central norm of social exchange (Gouldner, 1960), individuals differ in the extent to which they reciprocate (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Exchange ideology refers to the degree to which an individual sticks to the norm of reciprocity. Specifically, those with a strong exchange ideology strictly follow the norm of reciprocity such that they believe they should help those who have helped them. In contrast, those with a weak exchange ideology demonstrate a relative lack of concern for reciprocation and react less strictly to the norm of reciprocity. When they receive help from others, they may return the favor to a lesser degree or even choose not to return it at all.

In the literature, exchange ideology has been found to moderate various organizational relationships. For instance, the negative impact of perceived organizational support on absenteeism was weaker among those with strong exchange ideology (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Likewise, the positive relationship between procedural justice and satisfaction with a work training program was stronger for those with a strong exchange ideology (Witt & Broach, 1993). Also, the impact of different dimensions of justice on various types of performance was stronger for those employees with a strong rather than weak exchange ideology (Scott & Colquitt, 2007). These findings suggest that employees with a strong exchange ideology tend to react seriously to the norm of reciprocity. Doing so ensures that the loop of reciprocation is closed, and encourages further exchange with the exchange partner. Hence, although individuals with a strong exchange ideology may not be particularly active in initiating social exchange, they will adhere to the norm of reciprocity, which in turn will promote ongoing reciprocations with the exchange partner in the workplace. It is therefore posited that:

Proposition 3 (P3). Exchange ideology is positively associated with TMX.

We now shift our focus to the interactions between personality and situational factors in predicting TMX. In particular, the group-level situational cues considered are task interdependence and shared leadership. Trait activation theory provides a lens for us to scrutinize how situations affect the influence of personality on reciprocal behavior. According to the theory, trait activation is a process by which "individuals express their traits when presented with trait-relevant situational cues" (Tett & Burnett, 2003, 502). In other words, powerful situational factors can either suppress or prompt the influence of personality traits on outcomes. Social identity theory (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides us with another lens to understand how situational factors may encourage employees to re-categorize others from out-group members to in-group members, thus encouraging reciprocations.

Moderator: Task Interdependence

Task interdependence is one of the most pivotal structural variables in organizational settings (Saavedra, Earley, & Van Dyne, 1993). It represents the degree to which the design of an employee's tasks and job requires him/her to coordinate activities or exchange information and materials with others in order to complete the tasks and the job (Van der Vegt, Emans, & Van de Vliert, 2000, 2001). By definition, coworker dependence increases as a function of task interdependence (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). High task interdependence is often characterized by the interactive nature of the work, which in turn breeds a more open flow of communication and interaction among coworkers (Thomson, 1967). In addition, when task interdependence is high, coworkers recognize the need to offer help and coordinate their effort to solve problems (Anderson & Williams, 1996). In the literature, task interdependence has been found to be positively related to cooperation and helping behavior (e.g. Anderson & Williams, 1996; Van der Vegt & Van de Vliert, 2005). Therefore, in a highly task interdependent work environment, individuals' personality characteristics that discourage reciprocation – such as low propensity to trust, high reciprocation wariness, and weak exchange ideology – would tend to be suppressed (Tett & Burnett, 2003). What's more, task interdependence has been found to alleviate the detrimental effects arising from diversity of coworker personality profiles and the stereotyping and categorization bias that can result (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967;

Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). With more personal contact, coworkers develop more positive perceptions of those who were once perceived to be different, thus reducing the in-group/out-group categorization bias and encouraging more reciprocations (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Task interdependence is thus suggested to weaken the adverse influence of perceived differences triggered by the differences in personality among team members. In summary, it is proposed that task interdependence interacts with the three personality traits to affect TMX, such that:

> *Proposition 4a (P4a). Task interdependence interacts with propensity to trust such that people with low propensity to trust demonstrate higher TMX when task interdependence is high than when task interdependence is low.*

> *Proposition 4b (P4b). Task interdependence interacts with reciprocation wariness such that people with high reciprocation wariness demonstrate higher TMX when task interdependence is high than when task interdependence is low.*

> *Proposition 4c (P4c). Task interdependence interacts with exchange ideology such that people with weak exchange ideology demonstrate higher TMX when task interdependence is high than when task interdependence is low.*

Moderator: Shared Leadership

Shared leadership represents an informal, follower-centric approach to leadership. As a team property, shared leadership is achieved by the mutual influence and shared responsibility among team members for goal achievement (Pearce & Conger, 2003). When leadership is shared, influence and responsibility are distributed among team members such that each member is playing the role of a leader for each other. A recent meta-analysis underscores that shared leadership asserts a positive influence on various team effectiveness outcomes, including attitudinal outcomes and behavioral processes (Wang, Waldman, & Zhang, 2014). In particular, when employees are experiencing shared leadership, they develop common objectives and share the perceived need of working toward these objectives. This perception, in turn, not only encourages the generation of trust toward each other but also enhances cooperation among them (Mathieu, Heffner, Goodwin, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 2000). Hence, when an employee takes up the role of leadership, even if he/she is disinclined to trust, is wary about others' reciprocation, or is unwilling to follow the norm of reciprocity, the employee still feels

the need to serve team interests and thus to exchange knowledge, information, and the like with the team members in order to achieve the common goals. Accordingly, the dispositional traits are suppressed by the situational cues (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Further, as a leader, the employee becomes more strongly identified with the team. Such salient identity tends to encourage the employee to put aside individual differences and, instead, place the superordinate goals – the goals of the team – as the first priority. Those once perceived to be out-group members are re-categorized as in-group members, all serving as leaders for the team and pursing the same set of goals. Therefore, it is asserted that shared leadership plays a similar role as task interdependence in moderating the associations between individual differences and TMX.

> *Proposition 5a (P5a). Shared leadership interacts with propensity to trust such that people with low propensity to trust demonstrate higher TMX when shared leadership is high than when shared leadership is low.*

> *Proposition 5b (P5b). Shared leadership interacts with reciprocation wariness such that people with high reciprocation wariness demonstrate higher TMX when shared leadership is high than when shared leadership is low.*

> *Proposition 5c (P5c). Shared leadership interacts with exchange ideology such that people with weak exchange ideology demonstrate higher TMX when shared leadership is high than when shared leadership is low.*

Team-member exchange–Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance, a term that is not new to almost any employer and employee in the world, refers to "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000, 751). A lot of employees find striking a balance between their work life and personal life a challenge. A recent survey in Hong Kong revealed that employees' work-life balance only received a score of 6.1 out of 10 (Community Business, 2014). In another survey, about 62 percent of respondents reported that they felt work-life balance had worsened in the last 10 years (Au-yeung, 2015). Work-family researchers have long identified that work life and family life are interfering with one another (e.g. Byron, 2005). Yet, work and family need not conflict. Instead, these two roles can have positive spillover effects, leading to work-family enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

When one's family life quality is improved by work experiences, work-to-family enrichment occurs. On the other hand, family-to-work enrichment occurs when one's work life quality is improved by family experiences (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Here, we posit that social support and other resources obtained from coworkers are likely to enhance one's family role through work-to-family enrichment.

Social characteristics are critical components of work (Parker & Wall, 2001) and one's interpersonal relationships with coworkers may be among the most salient determinants of one's well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Myers, 1999). Greenhaus and Powell's (2006, 79) model of work-family enrichment suggests that social-capital resources, including influence and information obtained from the interpersonal relationships at work, can result in higher performance in the work role and family role directly. These resources can also enhance the family role indirectly via positive affect at work.

Since social interactions can help clarify and enhance role perceptions (Biddle, 1979), employees with close social exchange relationships with coworkers tend to have a better understanding of what they are expected to do and how to do it. They also have more resources to complete their tasks. This, in turn, can help employees encounter fewer negative outcomes associated with work. Supporting this line of reasoning, a meta-analytic study revealed that social support and feedback from others reduce one's role ambiguity, role conflict, anxiety, stress, and overload (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). When these negative outcomes are reduced, employees should be better able to perform their jobs in an efficient and effective manner, thus resulting in not only shorter work hours (Ford, Heinen, & Langkamer, 2007) but also better functioning at work. In addition, when TMX is high, employees can receive extensive influence and information from their team members – influence and information that can help them make better family-related decisions or solve family-related problems (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), such as information about how to better take care of their children or the elderly. These social-capital resources can directly enhance employees' family roles.

Furthermore, according to Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) model of work-family enrichment, social interactions at work can directly and indirectly through improved work role generate a positive mood and feelings of positive affect at work (Watson, 2000). Such positive mood and affect will

further bring better functioning of the family role (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This is because the positive affect can enhance employees' psychological availability and level of energy to engage in the family role (Rothbard, 2001), thus triggering employees' high attention in the family role and eventually stimulating better functioning of this role.

In summary, we believe that TMX can lead to better functioning of the work role and family role, both directly and indirectly. This line of reasoning is supported by meta-analytic studies which underscore that supportive workers can help reduce the work-family interference employees experience (Byron, 2005; Ford et al., 2007). As a consequence, when both roles are enhanced, role conflict is minimized and work-life balance is easier to be achieved.

Proposition 6 (P6). TMX is positively associated with work-life balance.

STUDY DESIGN

By investigating the associations between personality traits and TMX as well as the influence of contextual factors on these associations, the proposed model provides researchers and practitioners with new insights about the development of TMX. The inclusion of work-life balance as a consequence of TMX may suggest practitioners a new direction of enhancing employees' work-life balance.

An empirical study will be conducted to test the proposed model. In order to increase the generalizability of the findings, employees from a wide range of occupations and organizations in Hong Kong will be invited to participate – which can avoid generating results that are mainly caused by the unique features of a particular occupation or organization. The questionnaire will contain the items measuring all of the different variables to be tested in this study. In addition, the questionnaire will ask for the respondents' demographic details, such as age, gender, occupation and organizational tenure which will be treated as control variables. When necessary, a Chinese version of the questionnaire will be prepared using the back-translation approach. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be used first to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in order to confirm the divergent validity of the variables. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) will then be adopted to test the two-level model.

A pilot study has just been carried out and the results will be shared in the presentation.

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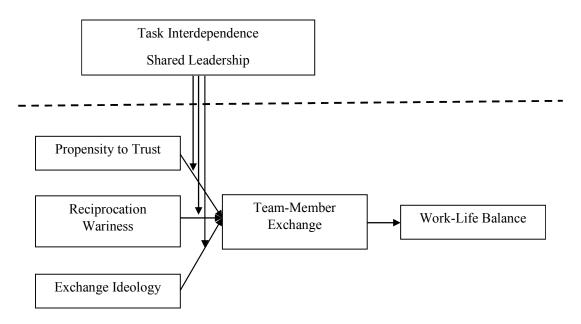Seers, A. (1989). Team-member exchange quality: A new construct for role-making research. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *43*, 118-135.

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Figure 1: Model of Antecedents to and Consequence of Team-Member Exchange

Group Level

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   Task Interdependence       │
│   Shared Leadership          │
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┌──────────────────────┐
│ Propensity to Trust   │
└──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐        ┌────────────────────┐
│ Reciprocation         │        │ Team-Member      │        │ Work-Life Balance   │
│ Wariness              │───────▶│ Exchange         │───────▶│                     │
└──────────────────────┘        └──────────────────┘        └────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐
│ Exchange Ideology     │
└──────────────────────┘
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Individual Level