

**The Mediating Role of Leader Member Exchange in the
Relationship between Job Characteristics and Organisational
Commitment: A Case of Ugandan Public Universities**

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ABSTRACT

In a major education set up and work environment management, leadership support concerns of academic staff in public Universities in Uganda are slowly emerging as a major inhibitor to job satisfaction, organization commitment which has led to occupational stress, employee turnover, burn out and brain drain . Many scholars have argued that consideration of job characteristics as means of enriching jobs and ultimate personal job fit on employees (academic staff) would lead to organizational commitment. It is on this premise that this study is aimed at examining the relationship between job characteristic and organizational commitment and the role of leader member exchange in the relationship between Job characteristic and organizational commitment of academic staff. Data were collected from a population of 1935 academic staff from three public universities in Kampala, Uganda with a sample size of 260 academic staff using the proportionate sampling technique.

The study found that job characteristic and Leader Member

Exchange were positively related with organizational commitment; however the contribution of the two variables on organization commitment was quite small with a variance of 13%. Findings further revealed that Leader Member Exchange mediates the relationship between job characteristic and organizational commitment. Academic staff felt that job fit was not enough for them to realize organizational commitment especially affective commitment. There was need for leadership support, trust, profession, mutual contribution, and constant communication in form of leader member exchange on academic staff development, and enhancement of organization commitment at the Universities.

Key words: *Leader Member Exchange, Job characteristic and Organizational commitment*

BACKGROUND

In a major education set up and work environment management, leadership support concerns to academic staff is slowly emerging as a major inhibitor to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, which leads to occupational stress and burn out (Billingsley, 2004, 2005).

Most leaders in public universities in Uganda have fallen short of meeting and implementing academic staff desired unique extrinsic and intrinsic needs. For instance, inappropriate instructing materials, overcrowded classes with less space, unreasonable teaching load, less support from management and inequitable pay. Some of the factors leading to inadequate fulfillment of intrinsic needs are failure to support personal career growth of employees as desired and insufficient mentorship. Such impediments have resulted in staff turnover especially brain drain of science teachers/lecturers, reduced employee commitment, employee dissatisfaction and consequently, low discretionary behavior (Kasozi, 2009; Owoeye and Oyebade, 2010; Karuhanga, 2010).

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Leadership in some public African universities is perceived to be authoritative and managers are mostly pre-occupied with management of internal conflicts. For instance, top leadership in Universities mostly manage by intimidating staff rather than having an amicable/ consensus resolution. This hinders the staff willingness to implement policies advanced by management (Hussain & Huque 2002:179). Considering Ugandan public universities, a number of academic staff acknowledged that leaders do not appreciate their subordinates given their authoritative nature of intimidation and hence, job insecurity.

University leaders have failed to support staff on their role thus increasing poor working styles. (Karuhanga, 2010). Besides Owoeye and Oyebade (2010) confirm that public universities like Makerere and Kyambogo have had problems in promoting good work style among its subordinates, the universities have suffered bureaucratic management systems. The leaders mostly have engaged in mismanagement and embezzlement of university funds that are supposed to support the employees' well-being and universities' infrastructural development. These vices have instigated various strikes especially with Kyambogo University experiencing rampant strikes both by academic staff and students upon embezzlement of billions of shillings meant for university development (Talemwa, the observer Sept, 2012). Such issues create a clear perception of lack of leader member exchange; the subordinates are not supported or engaged by their leaders to meet their intrinsic and extrinsic needs.

Ineffective management of public universities in Uganda could be explained by the laxity and complacency of university leaders to relate and support its subordinates in meeting the university and staff Intrinsic and Extrinsic needs, which could promote organization commitment and improved discretionary role.

LEADERSHIP MEMBER EXCHANGE

Numerous leadership studies have been carried out with much influence on academia, politics, military and government with an aim of promoting effective performance behavior, traits and adequate style (Truckenbrodt, 2000). One of the approaches adopted is leader member exchange theory. This theory was advanced by Graen and Ulil-Biens (1995), which focuses on the relationship of a leader and that of its subordinates. This implies that leadership quality will differ with each subordinate interacting with the leader such that leaders will naturally differentiate among followers on the preferred set components, attributes and behavior. Leader member exchange (LMX) could be well triggered by similarities between the leader and subordinate perceived similarities like personality, work orientation, perennial achievement and self-efficacy (Murphy and Ensher, 1999; Engle and Lord, 1997; Lunenburg, 2010).

Based on the theory, leader member exchange can be defined as a form of leadership approach that focuses on the role of a leader on different sets of employees / members in an organization (Dienersch and Liden, 1986 pg 618.)

Leader member exchange (LMX) is made up of three dimensions, namely respect, trust and mutual obligation. These attributes are based on working relationship characteristic for instance “mutual respect for others capabilities, the mutual obligation relating to individuals assessments of each other in terms of their professional capabilities and behavior. This obligation is expected to grow over time” (Graen and Bien, 1995).

There is a limitation of time all leaders face on job when developing roles for the subordinates. “Due to this time pressure, the leader develops a close relationship with only a few key subordinates and for the rest of the employees, the leader relies mainly on formal authority, rules and policies to ensure productivity” (Dienesch and Liden, 1986 pg 621). The argument above clearly divides Leader member exchange (LMX) theory into two

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components, that is, leader's interactions with in-group members / subordinates and leader's interaction with out-group members. These two components are based on high quality relationship as the former and low quality relationship as the latter in a group nature of LMX.

The leaders interaction with in-group members / subordinates is characterized with high quality relationship. For instance, managers with high leader member exchange will show high level of mutual respects, trust and obligation towards members and consequently member will enjoy the benefits of influence in decision making, clear information improved confidence and thus enhance greater responsibilities and commitment to the organization (Barbuto and Gifford, 2012; Gerstner and Day, 1997; Lunenburg, 2010).

The leaders' interactions with out-group members/ subordinates is characterized with low quality relationship. For instance, managers with low quality relationship will highly rely and be limited with formal employment contract, the leader here practices contractual exchange with members. Members in this component are less committed to do extra roles. This is because there are low levels of mutual trust, respect and obligation from the leader and vice versa (Graen Etal, 1982; Lunenburg, 2010).

JOB CHARACTERISTICS

Hackman and Oldham (1976) define job characteristics as a set of environmental variables that are widely thought to be important causes of employee affects and behavior. The business dictionary further defines job characteristics as aspects specific to a job, such as knowledge and skills, mental demands, physical demands and working conditions that can be recognized, defined and assessed. These definitions are vital in this study because they reflect aspects of jobs that are influenced by leader member exchange, and that would eventually cause organizational commitment.

Job characteristics are well explained by its theory, in the study of employee behavior. Job characteristic theory was built upon the premise that specific core job characteristics must exist in work settings so as to create job outcomes of high behavioral job performance and low turnover (Unuvar, 2006). According to Hackman and Oldham (1980), Job Characteristics theory is based on skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy feedback and feedback from agents aimed at influencing employee attitudes. In their earlier submission, Hackman and Oldham (1975,1976) found out that the core job characteristic (task identity, variety, significance, autonomy and feedback) lead to critical psychological state, which affects a variety of personal and work outcomes. These characteristics would cause high internal motivation, high satisfaction with work, low absenteeism and turnover and high quality work performance. If only employees have high growth, they need strength triggered by good leadership from the supervisors and management.

The outlined six job dimensions are skill variety, defined as opportunity to use many skills and talent at work and task identity, which means the opportunity to identify a whole piece of work; and task significance defined as the recognition that a job has impact on others and autonomy support, defined as the opportunity to freedom, independence and discretion; job feedback, information about ones performance obtained from job activities; feedback from agent, which means information about one's performance obtained from the supervisor and coworkers.

ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT

Organizational commitment is defined as a force or feeling that unites employees or individuals to the organization (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). It is the state in which an individual identifies with a particular organization and its goals. It is a state of psychological attachment in which employees invest what they value most like time, effort and money. Meyer and Allen

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(1991) describe three dimensional components of organizational commitment in order to maintain membership in an organization. They include affective commitment, normative commitment and continuous commitment. Affective commitment describes the integral attachment to the organization, meaning that employees derive feelings for their organization as accommodative family, which triggers loyalty and intimacy on employees' part. This nature of commitment develops on the basis of material and non-material exchanges between management and employees. Normative commitment explains the feeling of obligation to remain in the organization. This could be moral values and beliefs for instance training and development investment on employees amounts to an obligation on the employees. Continuous commitment refers to employees' awareness of personal costs associated with leaving the organization. Such employees hold onto the organization while still looking for opportunities elsewhere with the hope of leaving the organization once a desired opportunity is realized.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOB CHARACTERISTIC AND ORGANIZATION COMMITMENT

Dunham et al (1994) identify job characteristics such as task autonomy, task significance, task identity, skill variety and supervisory feedback as antecedents of affective commitment. These attributes of job characteristic are aimed at ensuring employee job fit and promote values and needs of the employees. Therefore, the greater the person job fit, the more employees attain organizational commitment especially affective commitment (Finegan, 2000). This outcome is supported by Kristof Brown, et al. (2005) who assert that person-job fit has a strong correlation with organizational commitment. Complex and enriched jobs are likely to yield higher organization commitment (Steers, 1977). This argument is further supported by Hackman and Lawler (1971) who believed that if jobs could be enriched

in certain ways, certain psychological states composed of special attitudes and beliefs would result, leading to positive outcomes including high levels of internal motivation, job satisfaction and feelings of commitment. Job characteristics antecedents in a real work environment would promote development of employee competences and hence, improve their work attitudes like organizational commitment (Unuvar, 2006).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LMX AND ORGANIZATION COMMITMENT

“High-quality LMX relates to positive organization and individual outcomes. These positive outcomes are based on role theory and social exchange theory as subordinates in high quality exchanges receive better roles, increased communication, higher levels of trust, and increased access to the supervisor. Some of these positive outcomes include higher performance ratings, better objective performance and increased organizational commitment” (Harris, Harris and Eplion, 2007pg 95).

This argument is further supported by Leow and Khong (2009) who assert that LMX relates to the amount of work and social interaction exchanges between the supervisor and subordinates. The higher the amount of interaction, the greater exchange of effort, resources, and support between the two parties, whereas a low-Quality LMX relationship, the minimal the exchange effort, resources, and support between the two parties. In regard to this, it can be concluded that LMX will relate with Organizational commitment at all levels, affective, normative and continuous depending on the level of leader member exchange in the organization. This assertion is supported by Ansari et al (2001) in their research on some attributes of LMX. They (ibid.) confirmed that LMX positively correlates with organizational commitment. In their detailed analysis, they (ibid.) found out that LMX dimensions of trust, respect, professional, affect and mutual obligation (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997; Yukl, 1998; Ansari, et al, 2001) positively correlate with affective and normative commitment, but are negatively associated with continuance commitment. Further

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research on a meta-analysis of 23 studies found a general positive relationship between LMX and affective organizational commitment (Wayne, et al., 2009).

Hypothesis 1: Job characteristics associates with organization commitment.

The relationship between Job characteristics and LMX

According to the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman and Oldman, 1976), “job enrichment satisfaction is a function of skill variety, task Identity (degree to which the job requires completion of a whole and identifiable piece of work), task significance (degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the work of others), autonomy (extent to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion), and feedback (degree to which the individual receives direct and clear information about their effectiveness)”.

These attributes are well enhanced when a leaders’ unique relationship between a given supervisor and subordinate are of high quality characterized by trust and emotional support (Harris, Harris and Eplion, 2007). High-quality relationships in return enable subordinates to receive several advantages including formal and informal rewards, favors, ample access to supervisors, and increased communication (Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Graen and Scandura, 1987; Wayne, Shore, and Liden, 1997)

Hypothesis 2: Job characteristics associates with Leader Member Exchange.

Mediating role of Leader Member Exchange on Job Characteristic and Organizational Commitment

When leaders in organizations nurture high quality LMX relationships by providing job enrichment (Bauer and Green, 1996; Lapierre, Hackett,

and Taggar 2006; Yukl, 1994) and offer inducements such as influence and support (Graen and Scandura, 1987), in turn, these create obligations to followers to reciprocate and become committed to their work. For instance, followers provide leaders with valuable work related contributions, such as, striving to add to the value of assignments, actively seeking out new job assignments and persisting on projects after others give up.

Leader Member Exchange has also been positively associated with intrinsic rewards such as autonomy (Liden and Maslyn, 1998), and support (Scott and Bruce, 1994). This implies that those with high job fit are more likely to meet the organization's behavioral standards and expectations for rewards. This is a sign of satisfied and committed employees. However, leaders have a more active role in reward distribution compared to the organization in that; they are often personally responsible for distributing rewards to employees. Thus, individuals with high quality Leader Member Exchange may still be satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization, even when their job fit is low (Job characteristics). This implies that Leader Member Exchange mediates the relationship between job characteristic and organization commitment.

Erdogan and Kraimer (2002), argue that employees with perceived low job characteristics in terms of job fit would correspondingly be experiencing low LMX compared to those with high LMX. They further argue that LMX acts as a catalyst in promoting employees' assimilation into the organization. Therefore, leaders with high LMX will influence employees to fit into their jobs and alternately trigger the desired work attitudes like organizational commitment.

Erdogan and Kraimer (2002) further argue that high quality LMX relationships influence leaders to have a more pervasive influence on attitudes, because they will be providing subordinates with support and rewards that are tailored to subordinates' needs (intrinsic and extrinsic).

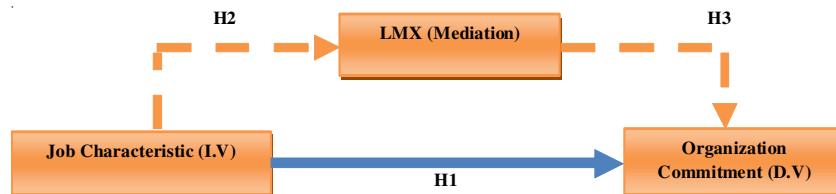
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Conversely, when subordinates develop low LMX, job characteristic will explain variation in work attitudes (negative attitudes that lead to counterproductive behaviors). In this case, the subordinates will rely on the general organization for rewards and support that are stipulated by the employment contract and thus, limit the desired organizational commitment.

From the previous literature review, the various relationships between (1) Job characteristic and organization commitment, (2) Job characteristic and LMX as well as (3) LMX and organization commitment. We therefore, it is proposed that LMX mediates the relationship between Job characteristics and organization commitment.

Hypothesis 3: LMX mediates the relationship between Job characteristics and organization commitment.

Conceptual Model of the Hypothesis



METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

The study utilized a survey research design, in particular, a cross-sectional survey design focusing on quantitative research approach. The study variables included, the independent variable as Job characteristic; the moderating variable being Leader Member Exchange and the dependent variable as organizational commitment. This design allowed data to be

collected from a sample to represent a larger population of 1935 academic staff from three public universities in Kampala, Uganda. Proportionate stratified random sampling procedure was used to administer 260 questionnaires to the academic staff (Professors, Associate Professors, Senior lecturers, Lecturers, Assistant Lecturers and Graduate Assistants) working in 3 public universities in Kampala, Uganda, namely, Makerere, Kyambogo and Makerere University Business School. Permission was sought from respective authorities.

We received 180 questionnaires with a response rate of 69%, which were subjected to data cleaning to determine the useable sample. Then 178 sample questionnaire were later considered for analysis with a response rate of 68%. Both variables, according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test and the Shapiro-Wilk Test which recommends values greater than 0.05, appeared normal. The participants were predominantly male (68%) with female representing 32%; married ones were 74% compared to unmarried at 26%; the common age bracket is 30-39 yrs (51%) followed by 40-49 yrs (17%) and 50 yrs and above at 11%; most of the employees have a tenure of 5-7yrs and 8yrs at 60%; in terms of education level, 69% had Masters degree, 14% had PHD and 0.6 had attained professorship; most of the employees were Assistant Lecturers (39%), lecturers (33%), senior lecturers (9.6%) and Professors at 1.7%.

Measurements

Job Characteristics

Job characteristic was operationalized using Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976). The JDS measures the five core job dimensions of skill variety (SV), task identity (TI), task significance (TS), autonomy (AU), and feedback (FB). The JDS consisted of 15 items with 3 items for each attribute of job characteristic. Responses were

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recorded using a five-point rating scale anchored by 1 = “Very Inaccurate” and 5 = “Very Accurate” (Cronbach’s alpha=0.754).

Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

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) and advanced by Gerstner and Day (1997) in their meta analysis. Each was anchored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree” (Cronbach’s alpha=0.753). The items consisted of statements like “I know where I stand with my leader, usually know how satisfied my leader is with what I do”.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational Commitment Questionnaire: Affective, Normative, and Continuance commitment were measured using Organizational commitment Questionnaire developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). This revised Questionnaire has 18 items. Employee responses were obtained on a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree.” (Cronbach alpha=0.851). Items consisted statements like “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization”. Individual constructs like affective commitment had a cronbach alpha of 0.728, continuous commitment=0.560 and normative commitment=0.701.

ANALYSIS

The analysis focused on first determining the association between variables, determination of both multiple and hierarchical regression analysis, it also involved analysis of LMX as a moderator variable in the association between job characteristics and organization commitment.

Correlation analysis and multiple / hierarchical regression analysis are employed to test the association and moderating effect on the basis of controlling the association statistics variables with LMX

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Variables

	Key variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1.	Job Characteristic	5.1504	.75153	1		
2.	Leader Member Exchange	3.2986	.68146	.201**	1	
3.	Organizational Commitment	4.1048	.95196	.233**	.326**	1

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing the Variables

Model	Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.644	.485		3.211	.000
Job Characteristics	.283	.093	.223	3.039	.003
Dependent Variable: Organization Commitment					
R Square	0.050				
Adjusted R Square	0.044		Sig.		0.000

Table 1 explains the association with the different variables, Pearson correlation table suggests that Job characteristics strongly correlate with Organization commitment ($r=.233$ $p<0.01$), Leader Member exchange strongly correlates with Organization commitment ($r=.326$, $p<0.01$) and job characteristic strongly correlates with Leader member exchange ($r=.326$, $p<0.01$).

Table 2 is a Multiple regression analysis, whose findings confirm the association of Job characteristics and Organization commitment ($\hat{\alpha}=.206$, $p<.05$). However, job characteristic explains 4% variance only to Organizational commitment. The results answer hypothesis 1 that job characteristics associate with organization commitment.

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Furthermore from Table 1, the associations suggest that there could either be a partial or full mediation of LMX on Job Characteristic and Organization Commitment.

Table 3: *Results of Regression Analysis Showing the Mediation Role of LMX on the Relationship between Job Characteristic and Organization Commitment (n = 178)*

Step and Independent Variables		Leader Member Exchange				Organization Commitment			
		R ²	Adj R ²	Beta(β)	t-Value	R ²	Adj R ²	Beta(β)	t-Value
Step 1	Job Characteristic	.040	.035	.201	2.721				
Step 2	Job Characteristic					0.050	0.044	.223	3.039
Step 3	Job Characteristic					.132	.122	.164	2.288
	Job Characteristic and Leader member Exchange							.293	4.073

Table 3 explains the step by step process of mediated regression analysis as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) that was used to determine whether or not LMX plays a mediating role among Job characteristic and Organizational Commitment. On the first step, LMX as the hypothesized mediator was regressed by Job Characteristics. Job Characteristics explained 3.5 percent variance in the model (F statistics = 7.402*, $\hat{\alpha}$ = 0.201, t = 2.721*, *p<0.007) in LMX. At the second step, Job Characteristics explained 4.4% variance in OCB with F-statistics (9.234*) and standardized beta coefficient is $\hat{\alpha}$ = 0.223 (t = 3.039*, *p<0.003). At final step. The dependent variable organization commitment was regressed on Job Characteristic and LMX. Both variables exerted 12.2% variance together in organization commitment with F-statistics (13.320*, *p<0.000). The beta coefficient of Job Characteristics is $\hat{\alpha}$ = 0.164 (t = 2.288*, *p<0.023) and LMX is $\hat{\alpha}$ = 0.293 (t = 4.073*, *p<0.000).

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), if the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable drops to statistically lower levels after partialling out the influence of the mediating variable then partial mediation exists between Job Characteristic and Organization commitment.

Sobel Test

We further conducted a Sobel test to confirm the mediation effect of LMX in the relationship between Job Characteristic and Organization Commitment using the Aroian version suggested in Baron and Kenny (1986). The reason behind this choice is because it does not make the unnecessary assumption that the product of s_a and s_b is vanishingly small as seen below.

Test Statistics	Std. Error	P.Value
1.95452892	0.0506387	0.04384177

The results show that ($t = 1.955^*$, $*p < 0.044$) reflects a mediation effect of LMX in the relationship between Job Characteristic and Organization Commitment.

DISCUSSION

Existing research about Leader member exchange (supervisors-subordinates) and on Job Characteristic and Organization commitment are far from satisfactory. As an effort in this under researched area, our study contributes to the literature by showing that there is a partial mediating effect of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on the relationship between job characteristics and organization commitment among academic staff of public universities in Uganda.

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This major hypothesis is supported by a number of scholars indirectly. For instance, Liden and Maslyn (1998), and Scott and Bruce (1994) argue that employees (academic staff) with high job fit are more likely to meet the organization's behavioral standards and expectations for rewards. This is a sign of satisfied and committed employees. However, leaders have a more active role in reward distribution organization in that, they are often personally responsible for distributing rewards to employees. Thus, individuals with high quality LMX may still be satisfied with their jobs and committed to the organization, even when their job fit is low (Job characteristics). Therefore, LMX is seen to mediate the relationship between job characteristic and organization commitment.

Considering the correlation results, all of the findings showed consistent results with previous studies. All the hypotheses were supported. Consistent with previous research, there was a strong correlation between Job characteristic and Organizational commitment. To elucidate, Finegan (2000), suggested that job characteristic attributes like autonomy, task identity, task significance, skill variety and feedback are aimed at ensuring employee job fit and promote values and needs of the employees; therefore the greater the person job fit the more employees attain organizational commitment especially affective commitment. This outcome is supported by Kristof Brown et al (2005) who assert that person-job fit has a strong correlation with organization commitment. In Ugandan higher academic context, complex and enriched roles involving training, consultancy, and research and curriculum development, apart from traditional teaching roles, would likely yield higher organization commitment especially the desired affective commitment on academic staff in public universities.

Besides, the study showed that job characteristic and Leader member exchange (LMX) were highly correlated. This association needs further attention within the academic context. However, current results are aligned with a few previous studies. For instance, the extent to which the lecturing

job provides substantial freedom, independence and discretion, and the degree to which the individual receives direct and clear information about their effectiveness would lead to a higher supervisor and subordinate relationship characterized by trust and emotional support. This implies that academic jobs that are enriched will help leaders/managers to exercise high LMX given the employees right fit and linkage to achieving organization objectives. High LMX is well triggered by increased communication, formal and informal rewards, honesty and trust which are well entrenched within the various job characteristics (Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Graen and Scandura, 1987; Wayne, Shore and Liden, 1997).

In addition, there were significant correlations found between LMX and Organization Commitment, which were also consistent with previous studies. The relationship explains the situation in which employees have a higher quality relationship with their supervisors. They get to enjoy the benefits of favors such as mutual trust, support from their supervisor, effective communication, consideration, and esteem, and consequently, they will more likely be satisfied with their jobs, accomplish more, and help their organizations to prosper. As the quality of supervisor–subordinate relationships increases, the intrinsic needs of employees are also more likely to be fulfilled; thereby increasing the likelihood that employees will be committed to their jobs. As employees have higher quality exchange relationships with their supervisors, they may be better performers because they can get additional feedback, resources and opportunities. This argument is consistent with Leow and Khong (2009) who assert that LMX relates to the amount of work and social interaction exchanges between the supervisor and subordinates. The higher the amount of interaction the greater exchange of effort, resources, and support between the two parties, whereas a low-Quality LMX relationship brings about minimal exchange effort, resources, and support between the two parties. In regard to this, LMX is seen to relate with Organizational commitment at all levels, affective, normative and continuous depending on the level of leader member exchange in the organization.

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Further research by Wayne, et al., (2009); Sparrowe and Liden, (1997); Yukl, (1998); Ansari et al, (2001) and Ansari, et al (2001) confirm that LMX dimensions of trust, respect, professional, affect and mutual obligation positively correlate with affective and normative commitment in education sector, but are negatively associated with continuance commitment.

Practical Implication

The practical implication that could be drawn from the study is creation of a pleasant functioning atmosphere. It has been established that LMX relationships with organizational commitment will significantly influence job outcomes. Given that influence, it is crucial for an organization to nurture existing relationships and to engage employees (academic staff) in organizational development efforts (Keup L.C., 2000). Therefore, organizations should encourage effective communication among employees and leaders by valuing open communication and increasing ways to communicate employee's extrinsic and intrinsic needs. For example, informal meetings with perceived mutual trust, supervisor support, mutual obligation and consideration of professional. Leslie and Van Velsor (1996) suggest development of interpersonal skills between supervisor and subordinates, which can help to move from performance focus pressure at work and instead create a tension free work environment. Clear and well discussed organization's objectives and key result area (KRA) to employees would promote perceived high Leader member exchange (LMX) and increase desired employee commitment.

Limitations

Like with most studies, this study was subjected to several limitations. Data collection was quite challenging especially on academic employees who was double as leaders, they were reluctant in giving their response on the nature of LMX on their bosses. Most of questionnaires given to such

employees either were not returned and only two of them were received by the researcher. This outcome is well explained by the response rate of 69% of the respondents. The response rate could have been the reason behind a small variance of 13% of the contribution of both Job characteristics and LMX on Organizational commitment. Besides, the study initial aim was to use sophisticated analysis in determining the mediation effect of leader member exchange, like Structural equation modeling. However, this could have not been possible given the small sample response of only 178 respondents against the required minimum for running SEM of a sample of 200 respondents and above.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study involved participation of academic employees alone with exclusion of their managers (leaders). Although subordinates (academic employees) would be quite an ideal unit of analysis to test the mediating role of LMX, it would also be interesting to acknowledge the perception of the leader on their relationship with their subordinates. There is also need to acknowledge the role of teams and leaders in these relationships like team member exchange.

Secondly the study focused on limited samples of academic employees in only 3 public universities in Uganda within Kampala region. With about six public universities in Uganda from various regions, there is need to increase the current sample by including the other universities like Gulu, Mbarara and Busitema. This would possibly improve the mediation effect of the study from partial to full mediation. The work outcomes experienced at Makerere University, Kyambogo University and Makerere University Business School could not critically be used to reflect the remaining public universities in different regions.

Conclusion

In our study, we focused on the mediating role of LMX on the relationship between job characteristic and organizational commitment. In general, the findings were consistent with the hypotheses set. The results showed that there is a partial mediating effect of LMX on the relationship between job characteristic and organizational commitment. Based on the findings, the researcher learnt that organization's leaders normally ignore the role of LMX as a component of Human resource best practice in highly influencing work outcomes. The researcher also noted that employees can have job fit but fail to be committed, especially those with perceived LMX. Therefore, promotion of high LMX is vital in improving organization commitment. Therefore, employee communication, mutual trust, respect, mutual obligation, profession and supervisor support are seen as key attributes that would improve employee commitment (affective and normative commitment).

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