

Justice perceptions, leader-member exchange, and upward influence tactics

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Abstract

Purpose – The authors examine the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and the selection of upward influence tactics. The purpose of this paper is to integrate research on perceptions of justice, LMX, and influence tactics in order to empirically test an integrative model.

Design/methodology/approach – Questionnaires were administered to $n = 407$ employed Masters of Business Administration students at a private Southeastern University in the USA. Structural equation modeling was used to test the statistical significance of paths specified in the models.

Findings – Results indicate that perceptions of organizational justice have indirect effects on upward influence tactics reported. LMX had mediating effects on the relationship between interactional justice and the use of rational and coalition tactics.

Research limitations/implications – The data are cross-sectional and were collected using self-reports, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn. The findings however, suggest that perceptions of interactional justice are associated with LMX, whose effects in turn are associated with the use of influence tactics.

Practical implications – Coalition strategies were used more when subordinates experienced poor LMX. The research suggests that perhaps for individuals experiencing poor relationships with the supervisor, coalition strategies might present an alternative to “rational” influence tactics (which are used more in high-quality relationships).

Originality/value – The current study extends LMX research by examining differing subordinate influence strategies in high- and low-quality relationships. It also extends organizational justice research by examining the effects of the interpersonal implementation of fair procedures on the dynamics between leadership and upward influence.

Keywords Justice, Leader-member exchange, Influence tactics

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

The exchange relationship between supervisor and subordinate determines the role that a subordinate assumes in the work unit (Graen and Scandura, 1987). Fairness is an important factor associated with the nature of supervisor-subordinate relationships (Masterson *et al.*, 2000). As noted by Scandura (1999), high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) development relies on each party viewing the exchange as fair.

Justice perceptions thus have important implications for how subordinates react to their role in relation to supervisors.

LMX is defined as the quality of the relationship between a supervisor and an employee; it involves an examination of the dyadic relationship, interactions, and perceptions about the working relationship (Graen and Scandura, 1987). Perceptions of justice and the quality of the relationship exchange have been the focus of studies in which researchers have examined the link between subordinates perceived fairness of organizational proceedings and the quality of exchange with their immediate supervisors (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2012). The quality of LMX may signal to subordinates which strategies to use to influence a supervisor because followers observe how the supervisor reacts to specific influence tactics (Cable and Judge, 2003; Epitropaki and Martin, 2013). Influence tactics have been identified in terms of the behaviors or strategies used to obtain a desired goal from a target individual (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980). Epitropaki and Martin (2013) note that relatively limited attention has been given to upward influence attempts in the leadership (and LMX) literature. Martin *et al.* (2016) note that there is tendency to be more lenient toward followers in high-quality LMX; with research suggesting that rational tactics may be particularly successful in obtaining desirable work outcomes (Falbe and Yukl, 1992). Thus, subordinates may employ certain influence tactics to persuade supervisors toward their point of view and the use of such tactics may be based on the quality of their exchange with supervisors.

Dulebohn *et al.* (2012) noted that the relationship between leaders and followers are socially determined and called for additional research that considers the role of LMX as a mediator variable. Research that examines responses to high- and low-quality exchanges is also needed to extend relational leadership theory – which focusses on the importance of the leader-follower relationship to follower outcomes (Uhl-Bien, 2006). A number of studies examine LMX as a mediator between justice perceptions and work outcomes (e.g. Murphy *et al.*, 2003). Rockstuhl *et al.* (2012) reviewed a number of studies in which perceptions of organizational justice were considered to be outcomes of LMX. Lang *et al.* (2011), however, found that perceptions of fairness have reciprocal effects on depression and this may also be the case for other variables of interest. The relationship between justice and LMX is likely to be reflexive, and we propose that justice is an important factor in understanding LMX interactions that influence subordinate outcomes and reactions to supervision (Scandura, 1999). Because inconsistent findings have been reported for the association of LMX with upward influence tactics (Deluga and Perry, 1991; Olufowote *et al.*, 2005), with more research examining leaders' influence tactics (Sparrowe *et al.*, 2006), more research is needed to understand how LMX may relate to subordinate upward influence tactics.

The purpose of the current study is to integrate three streams of research to examine perceptions of organizational justice as a factor associated with LMX perceptions (Sparr and Sonnentag, 2008), and in turn, examine influence tactics used in response to LMX quality (Farmer *et al.*, 1997; Olufowote *et al.*, 2005). We propose that perceptions of organizational justice play an important role in explaining the quality of the relationship between subordinates and their supervisors, and in turn, the resulting influence tactics used by subordinates. We propose theory and conduct empirical analysis to examine the mediating role of LMX in understanding the indirect effect of organizational justice on rational and coalition tactics (through LMX).

Background

There have been mixed findings about the role of justice perceptions and LMX on employee outcomes; it is therefore important to consider their joint effects in

understanding subordinate responses when attempting to influence supervisors. For example, Cropanzano *et al.* (2002), found interactional justice to be more predictive of LMX than procedural justice. Scandura (1999) suggests that in-group members perform at higher levels if they perceive that the leader is being procedurally fair. Therefore, fairness is an important consideration in understanding how the social exchange reflected in supervisor-subordinate LMX relates with subordinate use of upward influence tactics.

Our research highlights process features of work relationships in understanding the related supervisor-subordinate social exchanges. In accordance with Colquitt *et al.* (2001) we emphasize formal organizational justice and its related dimensions of procedural justice and interactional justice (Niehoff and Moorman, 1993). Procedural justice refers to an organization's rules, regulations or policies while interactional justice refers to the interpersonal implementation of procedures or the manner in which decisions are communicated by the supervisor to the follower (Bies, 2001). Research by Rosen *et al.* (2011) found procedural justice to be one aspect of the organizational context that conveys information about the fairness of an individual's job; it is closely associated with structural features of decision making. Interactional justice is more closely associated with relationship dynamics within leader-member relationships. Organizational justice research has stressed the critical role of communication in shaping justice perceptions (Lee, 2001) with subordinates having lower perceptions of procedural justice reporting fewer exchanges and less sharing of information, ideas, and resources. Employees respond to fair treatment from leaders by showing trust and respect that enables high-quality LMX (Erdogan and Liden, 2006).

Subordinates with higher quality relationships are likely to be more directly involved and interact more often with their supervisors. The follower-based perspective of LMX (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) posits that follower perceptions of their relationship with the leader are likely to influence their contribution to the exchange. Subordinates with lower quality exchange relationships may have indirect relationships with their supervisors, or relationships which are mediated by other supportive co-workers who may have high-quality relationships with the supervisor. Therefore, employees might employ different upward influence strategies based on the quality of the exchange relationship with supervisors.

Tactics that might be used in upward influence attempts include assertiveness, exchange, ingratiation, sanctions, rationality, upward appeal, blocking, and coalitions (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980). To limit the scope of our study, two commonly employed influence tactics were selected for inclusion (Charbonneau, 2004). The criteria for inclusion were the tactic is used for persuasion and the tactic is more likely to be used to influence a supervisor to fulfill a request. Yukl (2013) notes that of the range of tactics available, rational tactics are flexible and useful for most influence attempts and target persons while coalition tactics are likely to be more useful for influencing a boss. Other tactics were found to be mainly useful for influencing subordinates or peers (e.g. assertiveness, upward appeal, ingratiation, and exchange). Rational persuasion involves presenting logical arguments to support the feasibility and relevance of a request, while coalition tactics enroll the support of others to persuade another to fulfill a request (Yukl, 2013). A review of research on influence tactics (Yukl, 2013) reveals that rational persuasion is a core tactic that is highly effective in achieving objectives while coalition tactics can be useful for influencing a superior to support a change or innovation. Olufowote *et al.* (2005) note that rationality and coalition create non-political attributions because they are more likely used to pursue organizational goals than personal goals.

LMX and influence tactics

Upward interactions are affected by the nature of the relationship shared with the superior (Higgins *et al.*, 2003). LMX theory proposes that the quality of dyadic relationships is heterogeneous and predictive of outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels (Dulebohn *et al.*, 2012; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Research findings have noted that high levels of LMX can affect a subordinate's entire work experience in a positive manner including in-role and extra-role performance (Martin *et al.*, 2016), and affective outcomes (Gerstner and Day, 1997).

As noted by Botero *et al.* (2012), few studies examine the effects of LMX on upward influence strategies. While prior research suggests rational tactics are used in high-quality LMX dyads (Deluga and Perry, 1991), they might be used in low-quality exchanges as well (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Less is known about strategic alternatives in situations where lower LMX occurs. These relationships are typically more transactional and research reported by Epitropaki and Martin (2013) found no association between rational tactics and transactional leadership. In lower quality LMX relationships, the objective is to appear more persuasive using a non-political approach to influence and thus, coalition formation might be an alternative to rational tactics (Olufowote *et al.*, 2005).

Coalition involves obtaining the support of co-workers to bolster one's request and gain compliance (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). Coalition is not based on strong power dependence and subordinates may view it as more integrative than other influence strategies. They may therefore employ it as a means for relationship maintenance where a low-quality relationship exists. Coalition is also more widely available than other tactics because it does not rely on past favors or political astuteness (Olufowote *et al.*, 2005). Studies on the consequences of using coalition tactics have yielded inconsistent results (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). However, coalition may be an appropriate strategy for gaining upward cooperation when subordinates are engaged in low-quality relationships with their immediate supervisors. For example, Nonis *et al.* (1996) reported that coalition was used more frequently in situations of higher role ambiguity, suggesting that coalition may be a viable strategy when LMX is low. Further, there is evidence from descriptive research that managers use coalition formation to influence peers and superiors to support change, innovations, and new projects (Kanter, 1983). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H1. LMX will be negatively related to the use of coalition influence tactics.

As noted above, rational tactics are used widely and are based on utilizing reasoning and logic to gain compliance from supervisors. Past research finds that rationality permeates in all directions, throughout all levels, and across all organizations (Yukl and Tracey, 1992). The use of rational influence tactics appears to be universal (Farmer *et al.*, 1997) and it has been associated with LMX. Scandura *et al.* (1986) argued that subordinates in higher quality LMX dyads have greater participation in decision making, thus receiving more direct opportunities for presenting arguments and making requests. Similarly, Ansari and Kapoor (1987) reported that subordinates adopted rational persuasion more often when reporting to participative managers than when reporting to authoritarian managers. Farmer *et al.* (1997) found that the quality of the exchange relationship between a subordinate and supervisor affects the choice of influence tactic. Based on this previous research, we hypothesize that:

H2. LMX will be positively related to the use of rational influence tactics.

Justice, LMX, and influence tactics

Shao *et al.* (2013) assert that in the relational perspective, individuals are concerned with justice because the extent to which fair treatment is received reflects social standing in the unit; and this is manifested in the exchange between supervisor and subordinate. LMX is based on the premise that due to time pressures, leaders will not develop a close relationship with all subordinates (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) and some members will experience higher quality LMX which are characterized by high levels of trust, interaction, support, and rewards. Prior research has supported the mediating effects of LMX as a core mechanism accounting for the relationship between various antecedents and outcomes (Gkorezis *et al.*, 2014).

While employees may view the fairness of procedures as based on organizational policies over which the supervisor has minimal control (Wayne *et al.*, 2002), the communication of decisions reflected in supervisory interactions with employees influences LMX. Research by Masterson *et al.* (2000) and Cropanzano *et al.* (2002) found that perceptions of organizational justice are related to LMX. Empirical findings linking justice to LMX suggests that the quality of the relationship mediates the effects of fairness perceptions on employee outcomes (Masterson *et al.*, 2000). Scandura (1999) proposed that interactional justice contributes to in-group status and acknowledges that formal justice plays an important role in relationship exchange. Fairness is an important consideration in understanding how LMX relates with subordinate use of upward influence tactics. Research has yet to report empirical results on the pattern of the relationships in terms of indirect effects of fairness perceptions on use of upward influence tactics. Epitropaki and Martin (2013) suggest that organizational justice might play a role in the leadership to upward influence relationship. They note that perceptions of unfairness might be used by employees to justify harsh responses. Building on this research we propose that justice perceptions and LMX quality have joint effects in relation to upward influence tactics employed, and that the effects of justice perceptions are more likely to be indirect than direct. Research by Wang *et al.* (2010) and Xu *et al.* (2012) emphasizes that LMX mediates the relationship between organizational justice and outcomes. Justice perceptions are part of the trust relationship that develops in LMX (Fein *et al.*, 2013) and frames employee perceptions of being part of a high- or low-quality exchange relationship, which will be associated with the way their upward interactions with the supervisor occur. We therefore propose that LMX is a mediator of the organizational justice to influence tactics relationship and specifically hypothesize that, organizational justice perceptions will have indirect effects on rational and coalition influence tactics through LMX:

- H3. LMX will mediate the relationship between perceptions of organizational justice and coalition influence tactics.
- H4. LMX will mediate the relationship between perceptions of organizational justice and rational influence tactics.

Method

Sample and procedure

Questionnaires were administered to 500 employed Masters of Business Administration (MBA) students at a private Southeastern University in the USA and 444 surveys were returned with a response rate of 88.8 percent. After accounting for missing data the number of responses reported in our analyses is 407. The majority of

respondents (85 percent) worked full-time and attended classes on weekends; the remainder worked part-time.

The sample was 58 percent female with an average age of 29.9 years. In total, 45 percent were white, 29.5 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Asian, and the remainder reported being “other.” Average employment tenure was 5.1 years with 4.2 years spent working with the current supervisor. In total, 39 percent of the respondents were employed in the service industry, 23 percent in manufacturing, 17 percent in education, 9.5 percent in healthcare, and remainder reported their industry as “other.” In total 31 percent of respondents were at the lowest level in the organization, 26.6 percent were supervisors, 27.3 percent were middle managers, and 15.1 percent were senior managers. In total, 57 percent of the respondents were married, 60.4 percent had bachelor’s degrees, and 32 percent had master’s degrees.

Measures

Justice. Justice was measured using measures of procedural and interactional justice (Niehoff and Moorman, 1993) and the scales are presented independently because Colquitt (2001) reports that they represent distinct dimensions, reflecting the way that policies are implemented in the organizations. Six items represented procedural justice and eight represented interactional justice. A sample procedural justice item is: “Job decisions are made by manager in an unbiased manner.” A sample interactional justice item is: “When decisions are made about my job my manager treats me with kindness and consideration.” A five-point response scale was employed ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

LMX. The seven-item scale (LMX-7) developed by Scandura and Graen (1984) was used to measure LMX. As indicated by Gerstner and Day (1997), this scale is the most frequently used measure of LMX. A four-point response scale ranging from “a small extent” to “a great extent” was employed. A sample item, for example, asks respondents to describe to what extent they feel that their immediate supervisor understands their problems and needs.

Influence tactics. Two influence tactics from Schriesheim and Hinkin (1990) were employed in the study. The influence tactics of coalition and rationality were represented by three items for each (Schriesheim and Hinkin, 1990). Respondents were asked how often they used each of the influence tactics in the last six months to influence their immediate manager. A five-point response scale was employed ranging from “never use this tactic to influence him/her” to “usually use this tactic to influence him/her.” A sample item for coalition is: “obtained the support of co-workers to back up my request.” A sample item for rationality is: “used logic to convince him or her.”

Background variables

As noted by Epitropaki and Martin (2013) and Berson and Sosik (2007) previous research has noted the importance of demographic variables (such as age and sex) and other control variables when studying influence tactics. We included several control variables in our analyses: age, sex, work experience, industry, level in the organization, and supervisory status. “Age” was employed as a continuous variable, “Sex” was coded as 1 = female and 2 = male, and “Industry” was represented by 1 = service industry and 0 = all others; length was a continuous variable reflecting work experience. Cable and Judge (2003) included similar variables in their research as control variables, noting the importance of demographic factors and industry setting

in studying influence tactics. Age and sex may be associated with using specific tactics due to social stereotypes that are associated with beliefs that specific tactics such as coalition formation are more effective for females (Vecchio and Sussmann, 1991) and with older individuals using fewer legitimization tactics (Cable and Judge, 2003). "Length" with the organization and longer working experience might increase the range of tactics identified as useful to employees (Cable and Judge, 2003). "Industry" is useful to study due to the possibility that occupational norms are associated with tactics selected (Cable and Judge, 2003). "Level" was also considered with 1 = first level in the organization to 5 = fifth level or higher. "Supervisor" reflected 0 = non-supervisory status and 1 = supervisory status. Vecchio and Sussmann (1991) noted the potential association of level (less likely to use upward appeals at higher levels) and supervisory status with upward tactics such as coalition formation (especially for middle-level supervisors).

Data analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using MPlus 7.2 (Muthen and Muthen, 1998-2012) to test the statistical significance of paths specified in the theoretical model employing individual-level raw data to generate the latent factors of procedural justice, interactional justice, LMX, coalition influence tactics, and rational influence tactics. Confidence intervals (CIs) of the parameter estimates were calculated using bias-corrected bootstrapping (Cheung and Lau, 2007). Fit indices reported are the Akaike information criteria (AIC), root mean square error of the approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (McDonald and Ho, 2002). Each model included both measurement and path models to generate a full structural model. We compare four models, in each model the background variables were included in the path to LMX: our theoretical model with paths from procedural and interactional justice to LMX, and paths from LMX to rational and coalition influence tactics; an unconstrained model with paths in the theoretical model and additionally, paths from the justice variables to coalition and rational influence tactics; a direct model with paths from the justice variables to LMX, coalition and rational influence tactics; a constrained model with paths in the theoretical model, except no path is specified from LMX to coalition.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables in the study are presented in Table I – the coefficient α of reliability for each measure is reported along the diagonal. We examined the correlations between the variables of interest and the background variables and found negative correlations between sex and LMX (higher for females), and between age and procedural justice. We found positive correlations for level with LMX and procedural justice, and between supervisory status and coalition tactics. In testing the path model there was one significant finding for the background variables, with a positive association between level in the organization and LMX (unstandardized effect of 0.07 at $p < 0.05$). Because LMX, procedural justice, and interactional justice were highly correlated confirmatory factor analysis was performed using MPlus 7.2 (Muthen and Muthen, 1998-2012) on the item-level raw data. The results indicate support for the five-factor structure for procedural and interactional justice variables, LMX, and coalition and rational influence tactics variables (χ^2 (df) = 988.09 (314); AIC = 27,452.69; RMSEA = 0.070 (0.060-0.070); CFI = 0.910; TLI = 0.900; SRMR = 0.040).

| Correlations | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|--------------------------|-------|------|---------|--------|--------|-------|---------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| 1. Age | 29.81 | 7.24 | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Sex | 1.60 | 0.49 | 0.00 | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Level | 2.26 | 1.20 | 0.22** | 0.00 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Supervisor | 0.66 | 0.47 | 0.12* | -0.03 | 0.75** | — | | | | | | | |
| 5. Length | 5.06 | 5.19 | 0.57** | 0.05 | 0.18** | 0.10* | — | | | | | | |
| 6. Service | 0.41 | 0.49 | -0.20** | -0.04 | -0.07 | -0.01 | -0.20** | — | | | | | |
| 7. Procedural justice | 3.18 | 0.87 | -0.10* | -0.01 | 0.14* | 0.09 | -0.02 | -0.02 | 0.78 | — | | | |
| 8. Interactional justice | 3.49 | 0.86 | -0.05 | -0.11* | 0.09 | 0.04 | 0.01 | -0.07 | 0.78** | 0.81 | — | | |
| 9. LMX | 2.96 | 0.72 | -0.06 | -0.11* | 0.15** | 0.05 | 0.01 | -0.04 | 0.61** | 0.68** | 0.90 | — | |
| 10. Coalition | 2.58 | 1.18 | -0.01 | 0.09 | 0.08 | 0.10* | -0.05 | -0.04 | -0.15** | -0.10* | -0.12* | 0.88 | — |
| 11. Rational | 4.24 | 0.86 | 0.04 | -0.04 | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.05 | -0.11* | 0.07 | 0.13** | 0.14** | 0.21** | 0.94 |

Notes: Reliabilities appear on the diagonal. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations

Testing the path model

The results of the theoretical model are supported with the following fit statistics reported: χ^2 (df) = 1,186.48 (474); AIC = 25,255.40; RMSEA = 0.061 (0.056-0.065); CFI = 0.901; TLI = 0.893; SRMR = 0.049 (Medsker *et al.*, 1994). We use the theoretical model as the basis for the nested model comparison against alternative models (Bollen and Long, 1993). There is a lower AIC reported for the constrained model compared with the theoretical model. AIC reflects the lower number of parameters estimated in the model; Sugiura (1978) notes that the AIC may perform poorly if there are too many parameters in relation to the size of the sample (93 parameters for the theoretical model compared with 75 for the constrained model). The direct model (χ^2 (df) = 1,182.065 (464); AIC = 25,270.98; RMSEA = 0.062 (0.057-0.068); CFI = 0.900; TLI = 0.890; SRMR = 0.048) and constrained model (χ^2 (df) = 1,047.17 (386); AIC = 21,583.77; RMSEA = 0.065 (0.060-0.070); CFI = 0.901; TLI = 0.892; SRMR = 0.048) resulted in slightly poorer fit in comparison to the theoretical model with RMSEAs higher than that for the theoretical model (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). The χ^2 test was also used to identify the model with the better fit. As noted by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), when the χ^2 difference is not significant, including additional paths in the model does not significantly add to its explanation of the construct covariances (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). This supports the theoretical model over unconstrained one (χ^2 (df) = 1,183.23 (470); AIC = 25,260.16; RMSEA = 0.061 (0.057-0.060); CFI = 0.901; TLI = 0.892; SRMR = 0.048).

Hypothesis tests

For the theoretical model, the squared multiple correlations were 0.55 for LMX, 0.02, and 0.03 for the use of coalition and rational influence tactics, respectively. These results indicate that the paths specified explain significant variance for each variable. *H1* and *H2* were supported with LMX positively associated with rational tactics and LMX negatively associated with coalition tactics (Table II).

All paths specified in the theoretical model (Figure 1) were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) except for procedural justice predicting LMX; interactional justice had a direct effect on LMX, and LMX in turn had direct effects on the use of coalition and rational influence tactics. For *H3* and *H4*, we report the results for the 95 percent CIs with bootstrapping 1,000 samples for indirect effects (Cheung and Lau, 2007) of

| Path | Parameter estimate (standardized) | SE | <i>p</i> -value | Lower 5% | Upper 5% |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| <i>Direct effects</i> | | | | | |
| Procedural justice → LMX | 0.16 (0.21) | 0.09 | 0.09 | 0.01 | 0.32 |
| Interactional justice → LMX | 0.34 (0.55) | 0.09 | 0.00 | 0.20 | 0.48 |
| LMX → coalition | -0.27 (-0.14) | 0.11 | 0.01 | -0.44 | -0.09 |
| LMX → rational | 0.26 (0.18) | 0.10 | 0.01 | 0.09 | 0.43 |
| <i>Indirect effects</i> | | | | | |
| Procedural justice → coalition | -0.04 (-0.03) | 0.03 | 0.21 | -0.12 | 0.00 |
| Interactional justice → coalition | -0.09 (-0.08) | 0.04 | 0.02 | -0.17 | -0.04 |
| Procedural justice → rational | 0.04 (0.04) | 0.03 | 0.17 | 0.01 | 0.11 |
| Interactional justice → rational | 0.09 (0.09) | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.17 |

Table II. Path coefficients and confidence intervals of theoretical model

Note: SE, *p*-value, confidence intervals are reported for unstandardized parameter estimates only

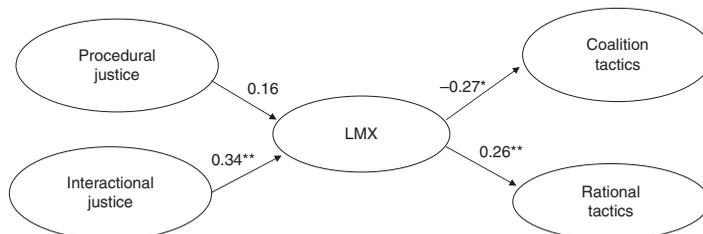
interactional justice on influence tactics through LMX. This test of the significance of the indirect effects (Mackinnon *et al.*, 2002) shows support for the indirect effect of interactional justice on coalition (95 percent CI ranging from -0.17 to -0.04) and rational tactics (95 percent CI ranging from 0.03 to 0.17) through LMX. The unconstrained model had additional paths over the theoretical model which specified that justice directly relates to the use of coalition and rational influence tactics; these paths were not significant. Thus, it appears that the mediation hypothesis is supported.

Discussion

The current study extends existing knowledge by integrating three important streams of research. Subordinates who perceived less interactional justice as manifested through communications with managers, reported lower quality LMX with their supervisors. This result is consistent with research on LMX which suggests that a lack of effective communication between the leader and member about organizational justice will raise questions regarding the leader's actions and may retard the development of higher quality LMX (Scandura, 1999). Research has recognized the utility of increasing proportions of high-quality LMX relationships within work units (Martin *et al.*, 2016). This research emphasizes the role of LMX in understanding the way that perceptions of justice relate to influence tactics; with LMX associated with the use of coalition or rationality as upward influence strategies. LMX was positively associated with the use of rationality and negatively associated with the use of coalition; and LMX was important for understanding the indirect effects of interactional justice on coalition and rational tactics. We did not find an association between procedural justice and LMX in the current study and no indirect effect of procedural justice on influence tactics (these effects might be suppressed by the high correlation of LMX with interactional justice, Colquitt *et al.*, 2001).

Implications and directions for future research

Models that incorporate justice variables explicate the way that the work climate affects perceptions about the supervisor-subordinate relationships and the types of behaviors that employees are likely to display based on their interpretation of the work situation (Masterson *et al.*, 2000). The current study highlights the importance of interactional justice for perceptions of LMX, suggesting that communicating and explaining managerial decisions and policies may be important for LMX quality (Erdogan and Liden, 2006). Interactional justice is important for LMX quality because communication is such an integral part of establishing trust in LMX relationships (Fairhurst and Chandler, 1989) and transparent behavior is important with all direct reports (Scandura, 1999). Martin *et al.* (2016) suggest that more research needs to



Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Figure 1.
Theoretical model and results

address the damaging effects of low LMX and recommend more leadership training. Therefore, leadership interventions in the future that focus on relationship development might focus on improving how policies are communicated to followers. The level and types of communication that take place in implementing and explaining policies might be important considerations for future research.

The current study extends LMX research by examining differing subordinate response strategies in high- and low-quality relationships, especially given organizational justice perceptions. Subordinates in low-quality LMX relationships might consider using coalition influence tactics (Olufowote *et al.*, 2005); this is consistent with previous research which posits that individuals who perceive that significant aspects of their environment are controlled by individuals other than themselves will tend to utilize the support of others (Tedeschi and Melburg, 1984). Subordinates in high-quality relationships characterized by trust, respect, and reciprocal influence might use rational forms of influence because they rely on their ability to present themselves as knowledgeable and credible; this invokes the leader's sense of reason and logic to evoke a positive response (Farmer *et al.*, 1997).

For individuals who are not members of the "in-group" or individuals with high role ambiguity, coalition strategies may provide an alternative to "rational" influence tactics because it might be successful in swaying the leader to support a request by using the strength that comes through numbers (Cable and Judge, 2003). For example, subordinates who have less confidence in their abilities or fewer opportunities to directly influence the leader might present and argue their case to peers since this represents a less threatening context. This might be an important tool for indirectly influencing the leader without risking deterioration of the existing leader-member relationship. Extending this logic, future research could investigate the role of coalition as a potential precursor to the use of rational strategies and the likelihood of subordinates in high-quality exchanges to present the ideas of those in lower quality exchanges. Where peers in higher quality exchanges are confident enough to present the ideas of others and share the credit, the use of coalition tactics might help subordinates in lower quality exchanges to build credibility and confidence through peer interactions that enable them to observe the targets' leadership response.

Contextual factors might play an important role in suggesting the influence strategies that an individual chooses (Ferris *et al.*, 2000). Potential moderators that might be examined in conjunction with LMX to examine use of upward influence tactics include national culture (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2012) and personality factors.

Limitations

While this study highlights some important and interesting relationships between interactional justice, LMX, and influence tactics this research is not without limitations. The data were collected using self-reports, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn due to the potential influence of common method variance in producing inflated correlations. However, confirmatory factor analytical tests revealed that no general factor existed that best represented the data and partialling out an unrelated marker variable (unmarried vs married) did not change our results; we employed procedural remedies to control for different sources of method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012) – including separating the presentation of measures by section in the questionnaire. We also minimized the scale properties shared by the measures in terms of response anchors and number of scale points. Finally, the data are cross-sectional and causality cannot be inferred. As suggested by Lang *et al.* (2011), relationships between

perceptions of justice and outcomes (such as LMX) may be reciprocal; future research that employs longitudinal designs will be necessary to determine causation. For example, experience sampling could be employed to examine the links between external context and perceptions about the supervisory-subordinate relationship; this would require collecting information about the context of the work relationship and the daily interactions experienced (Bolger and Laurenceau, 2013).

Our data consisted of employed MBA students; different results might be reported in the context of a single organization. Hence, these findings need replication in specific organizational settings. The strengths of the study include the employment of a sample of individuals representing different industries and the use of reliable measures. We applied SEM in order to take measurement error into account and present statistics that are independent of sample size (Bollen and Long, 1993). Our utilization of subordinates' reports is supported by previous research that indicates these tend to closely approximate supervisor reports (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2012).

While we examined the associations between procedural and interactional justice, LMX, and influence tactics we did not examine the role of distributive justice – because we were more interested in the role of perceived fairness of policies and their application during interpersonal interactions, than we were in the perceived fairness of decision outcomes. Research that has examined the various elements of justice report that distributive justice also plays a role in perceptions of LMX (Rockstuhl *et al.*, 2012), and therefore future research should consider its role in employee selection of influence tactics. Our *post hoc* analysis conducted to address its exclusion suggests that distributive justice did not influence the variables we examined. Further research is needed to understand the differential effects of fairness of decision outcomes vs fairness of processes and interpersonal treatment.

Conclusion

Theory and research on organizational justice, LMX, and subordinate influence strategies have progressed considerably, but they have been largely independent areas of inquiry. The present study is a step toward blending these three streams of research and demonstrating the importance of examining the role of interactional justice in LMX and the associated influence tactics employed by subordinates. We emphasize that organizational justice perceptions are related to rational and coalition tactics through LMX. This reinforces the important roles that justice processes and relationship quality play in employee reports about influence strategies. Future research is needed to test similar models to determine the extent to which LMX mediates the relationship between perceptions of justice and the variety of tactics selected by subordinates to influence their leaders.

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Further reading

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