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Daily perceptions of relationship quality with leaders: implications for follower well-being

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ABSTRACT

We examined how a key relationship at work, an employee's relationship with their leader, affects employee daily well-being. In a study of 129 employees across a variety of industries, we examined how follower perceptions of their daily leader-member exchange (LMX) quality across a workweek influenced their wellbeing (n = 468 observations). Results provided general support for our hypotheses. Specifically, we found that on days when employees perceived a higher quality LMX relationship with their leader, they were more likely to report a sense of belongingness, which was then positively associated with daily reports of vigor and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. Lagged analyses showed that perceptions of LMX quality were also negatively associated with reports of emotional exhaustion the following workday suggesting that these effects may persist over time. Finally, we found that day-to-day variation in reports of LMX quality attenuated the beneficial effects of LMX on relatedness and vigor supporting our hypothesis that uncertainty related to resource availability may contribute to a threat mindset focused on resource conservation rather than engagement. Implications and future research on leadership and employee well-being are discussed.

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KEYWORDS

Leadership; leader–member exchange; diary study; employee well-being

An employee's relationship with his or her manager represents one of the most important close relationships at work (Thomas, Martin, Epitropaki, Guillaume, & Lee, 2013). Accordingly, scholarly interest in leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, which examines the role of manager–employee relationships, has grown exponentially in the past decade (Day & Mischenko, 2015). To date, studies support a positive association between leader–member relationship quality and follower job attitudes, behaviors, and career outcomes (e.g. Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016). Because a high-quality exchange with one's manager helps to create an environment that is supportive of employee needs and values, it may also have implications for follower stress and well-being. For example, findings show that employees in high-quality LMX relationships are less likely to report stressors at work including role ambiguity, role conflict, and work–

life conflict (e.g. Culbertson, Huffman, & Alden-Anderson, 2010; Gerstner & Day, 1997) and lower levels of burnout (Huang, Chan, Lam, & Nan, 2010; Thomas & Lankau, 2009).

Although traditionally the positive outcomes of LMX have been explained through the mutually beneficial exchange of resources between leaders and followers (i.e. social exchange theory; Blau, 1964), some scholars have referred to LMX itself as an "interpersonal social support resource" that impacts employees' ability to cope with demands over time (Law-Penrose, Schwind Wilson, & Taylor, 2015). This conceptualization of LMX as a resource itself is important in that it presents opportunities to examine the leader-follower relationship through the lens of resource-based theories (e.g. COR theory; Hobfoll, 1989), and question prevailing assumptions about the nature of follower perceptions of LMX. For instance, Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) suggested resources can vary in transience - the extent to which resources are stable and enduring versus fleeting and dynamic. Although LMX has traditionally been treated as a stable phenomenon, scholars have recognized that individuals do not necessarily hold stable perceptions regarding their leaders (Breevaart et al., 2012) or the relationships they have in their lives, including coworker relationships (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). Indeed, Eby and Allen (2012) note that, "relating is an unfolding and ongoing process of sense-making" (p. 408).

Understanding such daily fluctuations is important for several reasons. First, well-being is considered a "dynamic construct that changes over time and fluctuates within a person" (Sonnentag, 2015, p. 261). Therefore, in addition to the research that has focused on stable, between-person relationships between LMX and follower well-being, looking at withinperson relationships at the daily level, and how followers' perceptions of their relationship with their leader fluctuate, may contribute to our understanding of the psychological processes affecting employee well-being. Second, to the extent that employees perceive variation in the quality of their relationship with their leader, this could be interpreted as a potential for loss of resources and therefore a threat to well-being, contributing to our understanding of how and under what conditions these dynamic fluctuations matter. Finally, variation in perceptions of relationship quality may have important implications for more global evaluations of a relationship (Neff & Karney, 2009), such as the longerterm maintenance of high-quality LMX relationships, and by extension the sustainability of employee well-being over time.

With this in mind, the current study examines daily fluctuations in employees' perceptions of LMX quality in relation to daily reports of employee well-being, which we operationalize as daily vigor and emotional exhaustion. Further, examining the validity of our conceptualization of LMX quality as an interpersonal social support resource, we examine its relationship with employees' sense of relatedness as one mechanism through which this relationship plays out. Lastly, drawing on conservation of resources theory, we examine the extent to which the magnitude of these daily variations moderates the relationships described above; that is, we seek to investigate whether variation in one's perceptions of their relationship with their leader is perceived as an availability or threat to resources, and the extent to which this influences the relationships described above (Figure 1). We first review the LMX literature as it relates to the stability or volatility of LMX perceptions, and then integrate conservation of resources theory as a guiding framework for the development of our hypotheses.

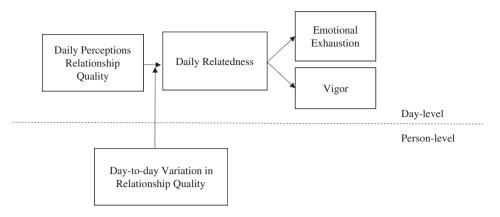


Figure 1. Conceptual model: Daily relationships between perceptions of LMX quality, relatedness, well-being, and day-to-day variation in LMX quality.

Stability of perceptions of LMX quality at the day-level

Leader-member exchange quality captures the degree to which the relationship between a manager and an employee is characterized by trust, liking, affect, and mutual respect (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The accumulated research has shown that employee perceptions of LMX quality are a consistent predictor of employee job attitudes, performance, citizenship behaviors, and employees' work environment (e.g. Dulebohn et al., 2012). Despite recognition that LMX perceptions vary among team members (LMX differentiation) and within dyad members (LMX agreement; Erdogan & Bauer, 2010; Liden & Graen, 1980; Sin, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2009), to date, scholars have tended to assume that LMX quality is stable within the person reporting it (an exception is Griep, Vantilborgh, Baillien, & Pepermans [2015], who assesses "momentary LMX" at the week level). In other words, the assumption has been such that once the leader and member get to know each other and establish a particular relationship, the quality of the relationship remains relatively stable over time. For example, Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993) showed that LMX quality showed significant stability such that new member expectations of the leader in the first five days of the relationship, LMX measured at 6 weeks and at 6 months were significantly related to each other. Similarly, Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Ilies (2009) examined LMX development in the first eight weeks of the life of a dyad and found that LMX quality showed an upward trajectory early on, and then stabilized at around 6 weeks.

However, these findings do not necessarily support the conclusion that LMX is stable. Leaders may not have opportunities to support, show concern, and act in a predictable manner each and every day. Daily interactions, events, or new information (e.g. hearing of a coworkers relationship with their supervisor) might directly impact the extent to which perceptions of one's relationship with their supervisor varies. Further, employees may have different and varying expectations and needs, which leaders may or may not be aware of or be able to meet on a given day. In fact, studies cited to show the stability of LMX quality can also be cited as evidence for its variability. In the study by Liden et al. (1993), the intercorrelations of LMX measured at different times ranged between .41 and .58, whereas Nahrgang et al.'s (2009) study with LMX quality measured every two weeks showed correlations as low as .33. This suggests that at different points in

time during the life of a dyad, employees report a relationship quality that differs from what they report at other times, suggesting that LMX quality also shows within-person variation. Further, we do not know if such variation occurs across days, weeks, or months. Taken together, there is empirical evidence to suggest that LMX perceptions may not be entirely stable within an individual. In order to explain this variation and what relationship it might have to employee well-being, it is helpful to turn to conservation of resources theory, in which, "the fluctuation of resources means that change is a natural part of the theory" (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014, p. 15) and where the availability of resources is considered a cornerstone to understanding well-being.

Conservation of resources theory

Conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989) has been drawn upon extensively to understand well-being in the context of the workplace (Halbesleben et al., 2014). The overarching proposition is that individuals are motivated to acquire and protect resources of varied types (e.g. job security, social support, self-esteem), which have value because they are helpful in achieving personally meaningful goals. In the context of the workplace, a loss of resources has been associated with the occurrence of burnout (e.g. Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001), whereas the availability of resources is tied to feelings of work engagement and well-being (Gorgievski & Hobfoll, 2008). The theory further states that individuals are particularly sensitive to resource loss, in part because the loss of resources is associated with future resource losses (i.e. loss cycle). This loss or threatened loss is stressful and associated with defensive attempts aimed at conserving resources. On the other hand, the availability of resources is associated with positive well-being because individuals can invest resources for the sake of future resource gain (i.e. gain cycle), and can better recover after a loss of resources.

An important aspect of the theory is its consideration of resources, and by extension well-being, in a dynamic context. Although Halbesleben et al. (2014) note that the time frame in which resource processes play out is not well understood, the continual dynamic and changing nature of perceived or actual availability of resources is an important part of the theory with implications for well-being. Drawing on this notion, research supports that subjective perceptions of resources can change daily (e.g. Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Thus, COR theory provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between fluctuating perceptions of resource availability (e.g. perception of LMX quality) and well-being, which are further described below.

Daily perceptions of LMX quality and follower relatedness

Hobfoll, Freedy, Lane, and Geller (1990) argued that social resources are important to well-being not only because they provide instrumental assistance to individuals in coping with demands, but perhaps more important, together with personal resources, they help shape an individual's personal identity. Hobfoll and Stokes (1988) defined social support resources as, "those social interactions or relationships that provide individuals with actual assistance or with a feeling of attachment to a person or group that is perceived as caring or loving" (p. 499). They reasoned that social resources facilitate wellbeing, in part, through the reinforcement of an individual's belief that they have membership in, or belong to, a group that is central to their personal identity. Because the workplace is a social environment in which people spend a great deal of time and invest significant personal energy, and because the workplace itself is a source of additional resources (e.g. pay, status), it follows that interpersonal social support resources (e.g. leadership) that reinforce a sense of belonging to the work group would be especially salient to employees. For example, research supports that leaders play a role in employees' feelings of social acceptance (Bauer & Green, 1998) and their identification with the organization (Zhang & Chen, 2013).

Interestingly, some research suggests that employees' feelings of acceptance and belongingness can vary from one day to the next (Van Hooff & Geurts, 2015), and these fluctuations are associated with daily experiences (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). For example, Reis et al. (2000) collected daily activity and well-being reports from college students and showed that social interactions characterized by meaningful talk and feeling understood and appreciated were among the best predictors of the fulfillment of relatedness needs at the daily level. Among coworker pairs, Halbesleben and Wheeler (2015) found that citizenship behaviors on the part of coworkers predicted employee perceptions of coworker social support (i.e. perceived availability of social resources). These findings suggest that daily experiences have the power to alter the extent to which employees feel a sense of acceptance from one day to the next. Coupled with evidence suggesting that perceptions of LMX quality could vary from one day to the next, and drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll & Stokes, 1988), we expect that perceptions of LMX quality could explain variance in feelings of daily relatedness at work. Specifically, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: On days when employees perceive high LMX quality they will be more likely to report a greater sense of relatedness.

Follower relatedness and daily well-being

Following the arguments outlined above, to the extent that one's personal identity is embedded in the social network of the workplace (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010), experiences that enhance a sense of belongingness would be positively related to reduced stress and perceptions of well-being. Some have even suggested that a sense of belongingness and acceptance is fundamental to the experience of well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985). A sense of belongingness indicates to employees the availability of sufficient social resources in the work context—resources important for meeting work demands, protecting against loss of resources, and may indicate the availability of other valuable resources (e.g. access to information, status, sense of personal worth). Feeling supported and close to others at work has been found to predict outcomes like employee morale, job-related well-being, and vigor (Shirom, 2007). Conversely, a lack of relatedness implies low availability of social resources making it more difficult to mobilize resources to meet job demands and more likely that everyday hassles will take a greater toll.

Accordingly, we expect that feeling a sense of belongingness to the social fabric of the workplace will be associated with daily reports of work-related well-being in the form of employees' daily experiences of vigor and emotional exhaustion. Research supports that emotional exhaustion is the major component of burnout (e.g. Evans & Fischer, 1993). Emotional exhaustion represents the affective and energetic component of burnout and is defined as "feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources" (Maslach et al., 2001, p. 399). Vigor represents a positive affective response comprised of feelings of physical strength, emotional energy, and cognitive liveliness (Shirom, 2007). Both emotional exhaustion and vigor have been shown to vary on a daily basis in response to employee experiences (e.g. Demerouti, Bakker, Sonnentag, & Fullagar, 2012; Sonnentag & Natter, 2004). Consistent with the above discussion, we expect that daily experiences of closeness and relatedness will be associated with enhanced daily well-being. Specifically, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: On days when employees experience a greater sense of relatedness, they will report higher levels of vigor and lower emotional exhaustion.

Taken together, we expect that perceptions of LMX quality will serve as an interpersonal social support resource that reinforces employees' sense of belongingness which, in turn, facilitates a greater sense of well-being within a given work day. Conversely, reduced perceptions of LMX quality indicate a loss of resources, leaving employees with a reduced sense of relatedness. In turn, employees are left with fewer resources to draw on to meet daily demands, and as a result, may experience impaired daily well-being. Specifically, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: There is an indirect effect of perceived LMX quality on daily vigor and emotional exhaustion through a sense of relatedness.

Moderating role of variation in daily perceptions of LMX quality

Finally, examining perceptions of LMX quality at the daily level introduces the question of whether the degree of such fluctuations is substantively meaningful beyond daily experiences. COR theory suggests that employees experience stress when resources are lost or threatened; thus, while resources themselves may be instrumental in meeting demands, just knowing that resources are available may be sufficient to reduce stress and enable a more engaged mindset. Hobfoll (1989) theorized that having resources facilitates a more proactive and engaged psychological orientation in which one can focus on the building and acquisition of additional resources as opposed to focusing efforts on conserving dwindling resources. Accordingly, it is possible that day-to-day variation in perceptions of LMX quality could be viewed as uncertainty in the availability of the resource introducing a threat mindset and negating any positive benefits of daily experiences of more positive perceptions of LMX.

We expect that greater variation in perceived LMX quality will have a disadvantageous effect on employee well-being. To the extent that employees perceive their relationship with their supervisor as a resource, variation in the availability of that resource could indicate unreliability, or a threat of potential loss, and therefore stress. Employees with high variation in perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their manager may be less confident and satisfied with their relationship and therefore are more likely to experience a perceived drain of resources that contribute to a sense of being emotionally

exhausted. Conversely, when LMX quality is perceived to be consistent, employees can count on the availability (or not) of resources. That is, we expect that the variability in the availability of resources is what is detrimental. Therefore, we expect that greater variation in perceptions of LMX quality would be detrimental to well-being and greater consistency would be facilitative of well-being. Specifically, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Variation in day-to-day perceptions of LMX quality will moderate the indirect effect of LMX quality on vigor and emotional exhaustion through a sense of relatedness, such that greater variation will attenuate the strength of the indirect effect, while low variation will enhance the strength of the indirect effect.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data were collected using Qualtrics Panel Management (http://www.qualtrics.com/panelmanagement/) from 198 employees working in various industries and occupations, over one week. On Monday (day 1), participants completed a baseline survey which assessed demographic and trait-level variables (e.g. trait LMX). Then, for the rest of the week (Tuesday through Friday, days 2-5), participants completed daily online surveys which assessed state-level variables that referenced their work experiences for that particular day. All daily surveys were distributed in the morning and participants had the entire day to respond. Of a possible 792 daily observations, 572 were provided, resulting in an overall response rate of 72%. Nine observations were deleted based on participants' indication that they were not working that day. Data from an additional 65 individuals (n = 95observations) were deleted because they provided less than three daily responses (which has been suggested as a minimum number of daily observations needed to make inferences about daily relationships) (Singer & Willett, 2003), leaving a total of 468 daily observations from 129 employees (average cluster size = 3.63). Most participants (81%) in the sample categorized their current roles as professional or office/clerical, and 69% were paid on salary. Fifty-two percent of the sample was male. Participants had a mean age of 46.68 (SD = 10.03) years and a mean tenure of 11.9 (SD = 8.08) years with their organizations. The sample was about equally split between those who were in supervisory positions (52.8%) and those in non-supervisory roles (47.2%).

Day-level measures

Descriptive information for the sample including means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among study variables are provided in Table 1. Established measures were utilized as noted below.

Perceptions of LMX quality

Perceptions of LMX quality were assessed using the seven-item scale by Scandura and Graen (1984). Items were amended to refer to the day-level. A sample item was, "Today, my working relationship with my supervisor was effective." Responses were provided on a 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) scale. Participants were instructed to

| | Table 1. Descri | ptive statistics ar | d intercorrelations | between stud | ly variables. |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
|--|-----------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|

| Variable | ICC | М | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------------|-----|------|------|---|-------|-------|------|-------|---|
| Day-level | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. Day of the Week | | | | | .15** | .22** | 13** | .23** | |
| 2. Daily LMX Quality | .64 | 5.22 | 1.46 | - | | .17** | 02 | .12** | |
| 3. Relatedness | .64 | 4.91 | 1.17 | - | .39** | | 41** | .40** | |
| 4. Emotional Exhaustion | .73 | 1.43 | .68 | - | 21** | 34** | | 24** | |
| 5. Vigor | .65 | 4.89 | 1.37 | - | .49** | .45** | 23** | | |
| Person-level | | | | | | | | | |
| 6. LMX (trait) | _ | 5.37 | 1.27 | - | .59** | .24** | 04 | .34** | |

Notes: Within-person correlations are shown above the diagonal. Between-person correlations are shown below the diagonal and represent the average of the daily scores across the week. n = 468 at day-level; n = 129 at person level. ICC values calculated in Mplus.

mark "N/A" if they had not interacted with their supervisor that day – and these responses were dropped from subsequent analyses. In addition to examining daily levels of perceived LMX quality, we computed a standard deviation score for each participant based on their daily reports of LMX quality which represented variation in LMX perceptions across the week of the study.

Relatedness

Relatedness was assessed using three items from La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, and Deci (2000)'s need satisfaction scale. These items refer to employees' sense of belonging and acceptance. A sample item was, "Today, I felt loved and cared about." The scale instructions asked participants to respond to each item in reference to their current workday. Responses were provided on a 1 (Not true at all) to 7 (Very true) scale.

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was assessed with nine items from the Malach-Pines (2005) short burnout measure. We dropped the item, "Like it's difficult to sleep" since participants were asked to respond to each item regarding the extent to which they felt that way at work today. Sample items were "tired" and "hopeless." Responses were provided on a 1 (Very slightly or not at all) to 5 (Extremely) scale.

Vigor

Vigor was assessed with three items from Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova's (2006) shortform work engagement scale. Items were amended to refer to the day-level. A sample item was "Today during work, I felt bursting with energy." Responses were provided on a 1 (No, not at all) to 7 (Yes, completely right) scale.

Analytical approach

The current data structure included daily measurement occasions nested within individual participants and therefore required a multilevel approach (Hox, 2002). Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC1) were computed for all study variables to confirm the need for multilevel modeling. Those estimates are provided in Table 1. Multilevel path modeling in Mplus version 7.0 was used to test the study hypotheses. Day-level exogenous variables

^{*}*p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

were person-mean centered and therefore represent variation from an individual's mean score across the week (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). For all indirect effects, Bayesian estimation was specified in accordance with recommendations by Koopman, Howe, Hollenbeck, and Sin (2015). This latter approach provides 95% confidence intervals which were used to interpret the significance of the indirect effects. Finally, in order to compute variation in daily perceptions of LMX quality, we calculated a standard deviation score for each participant based on their daily reports of perceived LMX quality. This variable was included in the model as a between-person moderator at the first stage of the mediation model. A significant moderation effect was determined based on whether the moderator explained significant variance in the random within-person slopes, as indicated by a 95% confidence interval that did not include zero. Finally, conditional indirect effects were calculated at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator to provide further interpretation of the nature of the cross-level interactions.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Prior to testing hypotheses, we computed ICC1 values for study variables (Table 1). ICC values represent the proportion of between-person variance in relation to the total variance and serve as a preliminary indicator of the need for multilevel techniques, as well as evidence for variation at different levels. Of particular interest was the ICC value for perceptions of LMX quality, which was .64 indicating that 36% of the variance in perceptions of LMX quality occurred at the within-person level. We also ran an unconditional multilevel model with LMX quality as the sole outcome variable at both the within- and betweenlevels with no predictors. As expected, results showed significant variation at the withinperson level (variance est. = .79, p < .00) indicating subordinate perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their leader varied from day to day in the current study.

Next, we conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (MCFA) to assess the distinction between constructs examined in the study. Items for relatedness and vigor served as direct indicators for their respective constructs, while exhaustion and LMX quality items were randomly parceled resulting in three indicators per construct. Results of the four-factor solution showed acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2(48, N = 468) = 132.61, p < .001$, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .08, CFI = .96, TLI = .94. We also tested a three-factor solution in which relatedness and LMX quality were included as a single factor. Results showed worse fit to the data $\chi^2(51, N = 468) = 279.63, p < .001, RMSEA = .10, SRMR = .11, CFI$ = .88, TLI = .85. A four-factor solution was retained and scale scores were computed for each variable.

Next, we considered the use of control variables in the analyses based on demonstrated relationships with the study variables as well as whether there was a theoretical reason to include them. At the within-person level of analysis, we included day of the week as a control variable as there was a significant and positive bi-variate relationship with vigor (r = .23, p < .01), relatedness (r = .22, p < .01), and perceptions of LMX quality (r = .15, p < .01)p < .05). Because we were interested in the effect of variation in LMX quality, independent of the level of LMX itself, we controlled for trait-level LMX at the between-person level when testing Hypothesis 4. Consistent with prior research on daily work engagement, we collected data on participants' age, gender, and tenure with the organization. However, because there was no consistent pattern of relationships and no theoretical reason to include them, they were not retained as control variables. Finally, following recommended best practices for dealing with control variables, in all analyses, models were tested both with and without control variables and no substantive differences in the results were found.

Hypothesis testing

Investigation of bivariate correlations provided initial support for the day-level association between perceptions of LMX quality and relatedness (r = .17, p < .01), and between relatedness and well-being variables of vigor (r = .40, p < .01) and exhaustion (r = -.41, p < .01). Consistent with these relationships, fixed slopes models controlling for day of the week showed that at the within-person level, perceptions of LMX quality were significantly and positively associated with relatedness (y = .21, p < .01), supporting Hypothesis 1. We also found support for the relationship between relatedness and participant reports of vigor (y = .27, p < .01) and emotional exhaustion (y = -.29, p < .01), providing support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 concerned the indirect effect of daily perceptions of LMX quality on emotional exhaustion and vigor through a sense of relatedness. Both outcome variables were included in the model with additional direct paths specified from perceptions of LMX to emotional exhaustion and vigor. Results of the fixed slopes models reflected the results from above and indicated that controlling for day of the week, there was a positive indirect effect of daily perceptions of LMX quality on vigor through enhanced relatedness (indirect effect = .05, CI: .02, .08) and a significant negative indirect effect on emotional exhaustion (indirect effect = -.02, CI: -.04, -.01). The details of these results are provided in Table 2. Taken together, these findings support Hypothesis 3 and

Table 2. Multilevel mediation models predicting emotional exhaustion and vigor from perceptions of relationship quality and relatedness.

| | 1-1-1 mediation models | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|------------|----------|------------|------------|--|--|
| | | motional exhau | ıstion | Vigor | | | | |
| | | Lower 2.5% | Upper 2.5% | | Lower 2.5% | Upper 2.5% | | |
| Variable | Estimate | CI | CI | Estimate | CI | CI | | |
| Day-level (Level 1) | | | | | | | | |
| Day | 01 | 03 | .02 | .04 | 03 | .12 | | |
| Path a: LMX -> relatedness | .11* | .05 | .18 | .11* | .05 | .18 | | |
| Path b1/b2: relatedness> | 18* | 24 | 13 | .40* | .28 | .52 | | |
| outcome | | | | | | | | |
| Path c: LMX -> outcome | 01 | 05 | .03 | 04 | 12 | .03 | | |
| Indirect effect | 02* | 04 | 01 | .05* | .02 | .08 | | |
| Residual variance relatedness | .50* | .42 | .57 | .50* | .42 | .57 | | |
| Residual variance outcome | .12* | .10 | .14 | .59* | .50 | .69 | | |
| Between-person level (Level 2) | | | | | | | | |
| Intercept relatedness | 4.57* | 4.36 | 4.83 | 4.57* | 4.36 | 4.83 | | |
| Intercept outcome | 1.52* | 1.37 | 1.65 | 4.62* | 4.27 | 4.92 | | |
| Variance relatedness | .81* | .60 | 1.11 | .81* | .60 | 1.11 | | |
| Variance outcome | .35* | .27 | .46 | 1.17* | .86 | 1.51 | | |

Notes: Models are 1-1-1 mediation models with a random intercept and fixed slopes. n = 129 at the between-person level. n = 468 at the day-level. Day = Day of Week; LMX = daily perceived relationship quality.

^{*}Confidence interval does not include zero.

suggest that on days when employees perceived more positive LMX quality, they experienced a greater sense of belonging with others in the workplace, which in turn, was associated with reduced feelings of exhaustion and enhanced vigor the same day.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 stated that variation in daily perceptions of LMX quality during the week of the study would moderate the beneficial effects of daily perceived LMX quality on well-being. In order to test the hypothesis, variation in perceived LMX quality was included as a cross-level moderator. Results showed that after controlling for trait LMX and day of the week, variation perceptions of LMX quality was not a significant moderator of the indirect effect on emotional exhaustion ($\gamma = .01$, p = .30). However, when examining the effects on vigor, results showed that after controlling for the trait level of LMX, variation in perception of LMX quality over the week was a significant predictor of the random slopes associated with the relationship between daily perceived LMX and relatedness. Specifically, under conditions of low variation in perception of LMX quality, the indirect effect was positive and statistically significant (indirect effect = .19; CI: .04, .36); however, under conditions of high variation in LMX quality, the indirect effect became non-significant (indirect effect = .08; CI: -.03, .20). In other words, when there was low variation in one's perceptions of LMX across the week (i.e. a higher degree of consistency), daily perceptions of LMX quality were positively related to vigor through an enhanced sense of relatedness. Conversely, when one's perceptions of LMX were highly variable from one day to the next, the day-level relationships between perceptions of LMX, relatedness, and vigor were no longer significant, indicating that these participants were not able to capitalize on daily relationship quality in the form of greater well-being. These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 4 and are presented in Table 3.

Supplementary analyses examining next day effects

Although our primary research question had to do with daily effects of perceived LMX on well-being, the nature of our data allows for a look at whether these effects persist beyond a given work day. These effects are potentially relevant for understanding how perceptions of LMX at the daily level could sustain or chip away at well-being in the longer term. COR theory posits that those with available resources are in a better position to face demands, and are better able to invest and build new resources. This cycle of availability, investment, and building of resources is what Hobfoll (1989) termed a gain cycle. On the other hand, those who lack available resources are more susceptible to loss cycles in which resources are threatened or lost and unable to be replenished. Research has found that a lack of resources at work is related to increased risk of burnout and associated indicators of poor well-being (Maslach et al., 2001).

Table 3. Cross-level moderation by variation in perceptions of relationship quality.

| | | Emotional exhaustion | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------------|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
| Variable | Estimate | Lower 2.5% CI | Upper 2.5% CI | Estimate | Lower 2.5% CI | Upper 2.5% CI |
| LMX→Relatedness→Out | come | | | | | |
| Low Variation in LMX | .19* | .04 | .36 | 05 | 14 | .04 |
| High Variation in LMX | .08 | 03 | .20 | 05 | 14 | .04 |

Notes: Models are random slopes models. n = 116 at the between-person level. n = 368 at the day-level. Models are controlling for day of the week and trait level of LMX. LMX = daily perceived relationship quality.

^{*}Confidence interval does not include zero.

Inherently, the process of building, or losing, resources involves the availability of resources over time. As such, we wanted to examine whether perceptions of LMX quality on a given day (i.e. the availability of an important interpersonal social support resource) would be related to employee well-being the following day. To test this, we examined the relationship between perceptions of LMX quality on next day reports of emotional exhaustion and vigor, controlling for the previous days' emotional exhaustion and vigor. Our results showed that there was a significant and negative association between perceptions of LMX on day t and emotional exhaustion on day t + 1 ($\gamma = -.18$, p < .05). The relationship with next day vigor was not statistically significant (y = .06, p = .53). We also tested the reverse relationship in order to assess whether being emotionally exhausted or especially vigorous one day would positively predict perceptions of LMX quality the following day. We found that controlling for LMX perceptions on day t, the relationship between emotional exhaustion and vigor on next day LMX perceptions (t+1) was not significant (y=.09, p=.26, y=.07, p=.46, respectively). These results provide further support to the notion that perception of one's relationship with their leader is a potential driver of well-being for employees, and that, at least in the case of emotional exhaustion, these effects persist from one day to the next.

Discussion

Scholars have suggested that the leader-follower relationship may be one of the most salient and important relationships in the work setting (Thomas et al., 2013). Coupled with a growing recognition of the role of leaders in supporting and facilitating employee well-being, and calls for more research in this area (Kelloway & Barling, 2010), it is surprising that only a handful of studies have systematically examined LMX in relation to employee well-being (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014). Our goal in the current study was to expand our understanding of the relationship between LMX and employee well-being by taking a resource-based perspective.

In doing so, we departed from traditional conceptualizations of LMX as a largely stable phenomenon and instead conceptualized perceptions of LMX quality as a dynamic, interpersonal social support resource subject to daily variability. Indeed, our findings indicated that followers' perceptions of LMX quality varied from one day to the next, which is consistent with propositions by COR theory that perceptions of resource availability are dynamic and change over time with changing conditions or experiences. This finding also reflects research showing that perceptions of relationships with others in the workplace (i.e. coworkers) can vary on a daily basis (Simon, Judge, & Halvorsen-Ganepola, 2010). Recognition of this variation complements prior between-person research by enriching our understanding of how LMX plays out on a daily basis, and opens the door for future investigations into the nature, meaning, and implications of such fluctuation.

Our findings support that one potential implication of these varying perceptions of LMX quality is associated variations in employee well-being. Specifically, we found that on days when employees perceived a higher quality LMX relationship with their manager, they were more likely to report a sense of relatedness, which was then positively associated with daily reports of vigor and negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. Hobfoll and Freedy (1993) argued that social resources are important to individuals because they indicate belonging to a group that has personal meaning or salience to

individuals' personal identity. We suggested that because the workplace is inherently tied to other valued resources like status or pay, and because individuals spend significant personal time, attention, and energy in the workplace, a sense of belonging in this context would be important for well-being. Thus, our findings point to an additional mechanism through which perceptions of LMX quality are associated with employee well-being, and suggest alternative paths outside of the explicit exchange of tangible resources and support shown in prior research (Blau, 1964).

Moreover, findings from additional analyses indicated that the associations between perceived LMX quality and employee well-being persisted- namely, that workers who sensed a lower quality relationship with their manager on a given day were more likely to report higher levels of emotional exhaustion the following day. This finding supports COR theory's proposition of the primacy of resource loss- a phenomenon in which, "workers are more sensitive to workplace phenomena that translate to losses for them" (Hobfoll & Freedy, p. 118). This finding points to the value in looking beyond betweenperson correlations among LMX and employee outcomes in order to garner a greater understanding of how these relationships play out. That is, examining perceptions of LMX through a resource-based lens, and specifically looking at short-term variations in LMX perceptions is needed in order to understand the psychological processes involved in the maintenance or deterioration of employee well-being over time.

To this point, one of the more interesting findings from the current study was the moderating role of variation in the perceptions of LMX quality across days. Our results showed that under conditions of less variation (i.e. more consistency in perceptions of LMX quality), the day-level relationships between perceived LMX quality, relatedness, and vigor were significant, while this indirect effect became non-significant under conditions of high variability (i.e. less consistency in perceptions of LMX quality). These results suggest that variation in perceptions of LMX quality may drain important psychological resources that reduce feelings of vigor during the week. Drawing on COR theory, even the threat or anticipation of possible loss of resources is sufficient to induce stress and cause one to focus their efforts on conserving, rather than building valuable resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Accordingly, our findings suggest that variation in LMX quality perceptions introduces uncertainty about the availability of resources for employees that causes stress and thwarts the capacity to become fully engaged one's role.

Practical implications

From a practical standpoint, understanding that member ratings of LMX quality vary across days has implications as well. Knowing this implies that it is important for leaders to build positive relationships across time as well as day-to-day. When it comes to employee well-being, it is not enough for employees to simply have a high-quality relationship; rather, employees must feel that the relationship is of a high quality regularly and reliably. COR theory suggests that even the anticipation of loss of resources is sufficient to cause stress to individuals (Hobfoll, 1989), and our findings support this notion. For leaders, this suggests that there is value in reassuring followers and actively conveying trust, liking, and care on a regular basis.

The findings in the current study suggest that one means by which daily perceptions of LMX quality relate to employee emotional exhaustion and vigor is through conveying a

sense of closeness and belonging. Thus, actions on the part of leaders that support that all employees are part of the "in group" and can trust, rely on, and support each other is another strategy that may facilitate a sense of belongingness and closeness among employees. Notably, our data suggest that the satisfaction of these needs for relatedness vary between-persons as well as within-individuals from day-to-day. Therefore, leaders should be aware of followers' varying needs especially for belonging, understanding that different followers (or the same follower on different days) may need to be shown support to varying degrees.

At the same time, because LMX is inherently a dyadic process involving both the leader and the follower, members should seek to engage in thoughts and behaviors which help to facilitate a sense of closeness with their leader. A proactive approach by followers may be especially relevant when leaders are responsible for managing large teams making it difficult to maintain close relationships with all employees. For example, followers may make a point to reach out to their leaders on a regular basis for assistance in solving problems, working through challenges, or otherwise communicating about work being done. These regular interactions may help to solidify a sense of an effective and mutually beneficial working relationship, and build trust and confidence among both parties.

Potential limitations and future research avenues

As is the case with any study, we note that the present study has potential limitations. The first concern we note is the self-report nature of our data, which introduces the potential for issues of common-method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We chose to focus on follower reports of the variables in the current study due to the inherently subjective nature of factors such as the sense of relatedness and personal well-being. Because these outcomes were the focus of this study, we expected that followers' perceptions of their relationship with their leader would be more important than how the leader perceives the relationship. This is consistent with other research which has examined leadership in relation to these factors (e.g. Graves & Luciano, 2013), and provides an alternate perspective to studies taking the manager's perspective (e.g. Lanaj, Johnson, & Lee, 2016). In order to address this further, we examined correlations among study variables and found that they were moderate in nature indicating that they were not severely inflated. Future research that incorporates both leader and follower reports of LMX would be useful given the inherent dyadic nature of the phenomenon. Indeed, doing so would enable a look at whether leader reports of LMX quality are also variable to the same extent and if such variations coincide with follower reports.

Related to this, it would be important for future research to separate the measurement of the variables in the study within each day. There are potential empirical and theoretical benefits to doing so. For instance, in the current study, participants provided responses to all study variables at a single time point within each day, and could provide responses at their convenience throughout the day. Although we tested and did not find support for an alternative model in which relatedness indirectly relates to well-being via enhanced perceptions of LMX quality, it is not possible to fully determine the directionality of these relationships. From an empirical standpoint, the timing of the surveys introduces the possibility that early responses during the day did not properly take into account the entire day's experiences, and that late responses could have been subject to greater

recall bias. However, our concerns are somewhat tempered by the understanding that one of the strengths of daily research is that it does not rely to the same extent as other designs on participants' memory. Further, we were able to test relationships between study variables from one day to the next. Our results indicated significant associations between daily perceptions of LMX and emotional exhaustion the following work day (after controlling for emotional exhaustion from the previous day); conversely, no support was found for a model in which well-being predicts LMX perceptions the following day, lending some additional empirical support to our theoretical expectation of the directionality of these relationships. Nevertheless, future research that separates the measurement occasions would be in a better position to rule out these concerns.

In addition, we note that this study focused on a diverse set of employment settings. While this helps to ensure that the findings generalize, it also means that we were not able to isolate unique aspects of the environment or employees that may have influenced relationships in the current study. It may be that variation in perceptions of LMX quality are more or less pronounced in certain work environments, such as those where employees have less contact with their manager, or where the culture of the organization promotes a greater sense of hierarchy between employees and their managers. For example, virtual arrangements in which leaders and followers have fewer interactions within a work day may influence the salience and meaningfulness of the interactions as opposed to leaders and followers who reside within the same work location and have a number of interactions over the course of the work day.

Related to this, it is important for future research to explore characteristics of the person or the leader-member dyad in relation to variation in follower perceptions of LMX quality. Thomas et al. (2013) called for integration of LMX research with the literature on close relationships outside of the workplace. In the current study, we have taken a first step in this direction by examining fluctuation in perceptions of relationship quality, however future research can build on and extend these findings by including features of the person (e.g. personality) or relationship as predictors of relationship quality and development. For instance, Thomas et al. (2013) discussed the potential role of attachment style on the quality of the leader-member dyad. They reasoned that a match or mismatch in attachment style could have implications for interactions developed between leaders and followers and ultimately for their relationships. It follows that follower anxious attachment styles combined with avoidant leader attachment style could exacerbate follower insecurities and behaviors leading to the perception of greater fluctuation in the quality of the relationship.

Conclusion

This study underscores the relevance of taking an explicit resource-based perspective on traditional concepts and phenomenon in the organizational literature when the goal is to understand effects on employee stress and well-being. Drawing on COR theory, our results showed that on days when employees perceive a high-quality relationship with their manager, they were more likely to report a greater sense of belonging and relatedness, which, in turn, was associated with enhanced daily vigor and reduced emotional exhaustion. Moreover, our findings showed that perceptions of LMX quality had a lagged effect on next day emotional exhaustion, suggesting these perceptions of relationship quality may persist over time. Further, greater variation in perceptions of LMX quality over the course of the work week attenuated the indirect effects on vigor suggesting that variation may reflect uncertainty about the relationship that taxes employees of important resources. Overall, our study suggests that perceived LMX quality is an important interpersonal resource that fluctuates on daily basis and has implications for employee well-being.

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