

National Center for Women & Information Technology

P R O M I S I N G P R A C T I C E S

Taking Stock of Leader-Member Relationships (Case Study 1) A Critical Leadership Component for Women's Retention and Advancement



Conduct “relationship audits” to periodically measure the quality of the leader-member relationships in your organization. This information will allow you to benchmark the relationships and track changes in response to your deliberate attempts to improve them. The following survey items can help you accomplish these tasks. They are adapted from those used in research where the benefits of positive leader-member relationships (LMX) were documented. When you review your results, think about whether pairings of different sexes or races achieve high quality LMX. If quality is low or lower for mixed pairs, steps should be taken to help leaders enhance their skills in communicating respect and building trust.

The first set of questions is based on those most used in LMX research. Responses to the following questions may use a 6-point scale where 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=slightly agree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=strongly agree, and N/A indicates not applicable.

[FOR ALL]	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I usually know how satisfied my [leader/member, supervisor/ subordinate, department head/faculty member] is with what I do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My [...] understands my work-related needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My [...] and I are alike in a number of ways.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My relationship with my [...] is very effective.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[FOR LEADERS]	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I would be willing to “rescue” my [subordinate/faculty member], even at my own expense, if s/he really needed it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would use my power to solve problems in my [...]’s work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand my [...]’s potential.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My [...] has enough confidence in me that s/he would defend my decisions if I was not present to do so.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
[FOR MEMBERS]	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I can count on my manager to ‘bail me out’ even at his or her own expense, when I really need it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My [...] would use his/her power to solve problems in my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My [...] understands my potential.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My [...] has enough confidence in me that s/he would defend my decisions if I was not present to do so.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Alternatively, researchers recently suggested rating leader-member relationships on a series of criteria such as the following:

My relationship with my [...] is

- Very effective, somewhat effective, slightly effective, slightly ineffective, somewhat ineffective, very ineffective
- Very warm, somewhat warm, slightly warm, slightly cold, somewhat cold, very cold
- Very flexible, somewhat flexible, slightly flexible, slightly inflexible, somewhat inflexible, very inflexible
- Very strong, somewhat strong, slightly strong, slightly weak, somewhat weak, very weak
- Very cooperative, somewhat cooperative, slightly cooperative, slightly uncooperative, somewhat uncooperative, very uncooperative
- Very fair, somewhat fair, slightly fair, slightly unfair, somewhat unfair, very unfair
- Very productive, somewhat productive, slightly productive, slightly unproductive, somewhat unproductive, very unproductive

RESOURCES

Van Breukelen, W., Schyns, B., & Le Blanc, P. (2006). Leader-member exchange theory and research: Accomplishments and future challenges. *Leadership*, 2(3), 295-316.

NCWIT offers practices for increasing and benefiting from gender diversity in IT at the K-12, undergraduate, graduate, and career levels.
This case study describes a research-inspired practice that may need further evaluation. Try it, and let us know your results.

National Center for Women & Information Technology

PROMISING PRACTICES

How Can Leader-Member Relationships Promote Women's Retention and Advancement? with Case Study 1



Career

The unique working relationship between a supervisor or department head and each individual employee or faculty member affects both organizational and personal outcomes. This impact has been documented through years of research based on a leadership theory about patterns of exchanges between leaders and members (LMX). Findings show that leaders tend to develop more positive relationships with some organizational members than with others. These "in-group" relationships, characterized by exchanges of trust, respect, and low formality, have a measurable positive influence on the performance, job satisfaction, and commitment of both men and women. Unfortunately, positive relationships are more likely to form between people who see themselves as similar. Because most IT leaders are men, women in IT less often achieve in-group status.

HOW DOES GENDER AFFECT LEADER-MEMBER RELATIONSHIPS?

Although leaders are more likely to initiate and develop high quality relationships with people similar to themselves, awareness of this tendency may help leaders consciously include women and members of minority groups. Fortunately, LMX seems to produce similar results for men and women leaders and members, although certain aspects of the relationship may vary depending on the gender composition of the leader-member pair. For example, one difference of great relevance for women and IT is that high-quality LMX correlates with increased work self-efficacy. In other words, leaders who establish positive working relationships with women new to their group engender greater self-confidence in the women's ability to succeed. Because low self-efficacy is commonly reported by women in IT, and a sharp decline often precedes departure, LMX quality may be especially important in this context.

HOW CAN LEADERS DEVELOP POSITIVE LMX?

Step 1. Leader-member relationships develop over time, but from the very beginning mutual respect is crucial. Leaders must recognize and value the qualities the member brings to their organization and must communicate that respect early, within the first few weeks of contact. Leaders can communicate and model respect by explicitly telling group members that they are capable of doing challenging tasks, acknowledging the validity of any concerns, and treating them as individuals, not as representatives of their sex or race. It may be useful for leaders to explicitly say that they want a high-quality working relationship.

RESOURCES

- Hiller, N.J. & Day, D.V. (2003). LMX and teamwork: The challenges and opportunities of diversity. In G.B. Graen (Ed.), *Dealing with Diversity*. Information Age Publishing.
- Scandura, T. A. & Lankau, M. J. (1996). Developing diverse leaders: A leader-member exchange approach. *Leadership Quarterly*, 7(2), 243-263.
- Reid, M.F., Allen, M.W., Riemenschneider, C.D., & Armstrong, D.J. (2008). The role of mentoring and supervisor support for state IT employees' affective organizational commitment. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 28(1), 60-78.
- Whitener, E. M., Brodt, S.E., Korsgaard, M. A., & Werner, J. M. (1998). Managers as initiators of trust: An exchange relationship framework for understanding managerial trustworthy behavior. *The Academy of Management Review*, 23, 513-530.

LEADERS EXERT TREMENDOUS INFLUENCE

Women's retention and advancement in computing depends to a great extent upon people in positions of power and how their actions promote or inhibit women's success. For example, when leaders provide women with the resources routinely available to men, women's engagement and commitment increases.

Resources that leaders provide include more than funds, equipment, physical space, opportunities, or even information. The relationship between a leader (supervisor or department head, for example) and a member (employee or faculty member) is a crucial and highly influential resource. It can include mentoring, but more routinely and more powerfully, it involves everyday exchanges that affect individual and organizational outcomes.

Step 2. Mutual trust occurs when a leader and a member share a belief that they can depend on each other in accomplishing goals. Leaders should offer opportunities, relying on the member to accept and perform dependably. Leaders also must follow through with rewards, including "face time" and greater autonomy. Ensuring that members know the leader would rescue or back them up, if necessary, is also important.

Step 3. Mutual commitment and obligation grow as the relationship matures. As justification for trust builds, leaders should develop shared understanding of organizational goals with their members and include members in decision-making. As leaders and members learn what to expect from each other, the pair should develop career interdependence.

These steps in forming a positive relationship require that leaders possess interpersonal skills including effective listening and communication. Other behaviors that contribute to building trusting relationships, according to Whitener et al., include: consistency, integrity, sharing and delegation of control, communication, and demonstration of concern.

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