

**Antecedents of Leader-Member Exchange: Agency and Communion as Guides to Better
Work Relationships Among Managers and Subordinates**

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Abstract

Positive work relationships are crucial for organizational performance and employees' wellbeing. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), a measure of positive work relations, has been linked to many positive organizational outcomes. However, antecedents of LMX are less well researched. The two fundamental social perceptions agency and communion are investigated as predictors of LMX in this research. Assuming that the primacy effect of communion does not hold in the organizational context, agency perceptions are hypothesized to be the stronger predictor of LMX in managers and subordinates. The hierarchical position of managers and subordinates is considered a moderator, meaning that perceptions of agency are more important to managers and perceptions of communion to subordinates. Investigating a mediation process, individuals are assumed to perceive agency and communion as instrumental to their goals conditional on their power position. The regression analysis includes data from 319 Dutch employees and their managers. Results support agency and communion perceptions of managers and subordinates as predictors of LMX. Communion is the stronger predictor, contradicting the hypothesized effect. The hypotheses regarding power position and instrumentality of agency and communion perceptions are not supported. However, among subordinates, the associations between agency and communion perceptions with LMX are partially mediated by their perceived instrumentality. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Leader-Member Exchange; agency; communion; Relationship instrumentality, power

Antecedents of Leader-Member Exchange: Agency and Communion as Guides to Better Work Relationships Among Managers and Subordinates

“People do not quit their job, they quit their bosses.” (Goler et al., 2018). This saying highlights, that not only job characteristics but also social aspects of the workplace (e.g., work relationships) can affect individuals’ decisions about their work and influence important organizational outcomes such as turnover. Empirical research provides support for this. Leader-member exchange (LMX), being a measure of relationship quality between managers and subordinates, has been linked to both reduced turnover intention and turnover behaviour (Beverly, 2017; Graen et al., 1982; Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984). Next to turnover, LMX has been connected to numerous positive organizational outcomes such as increased task performance, increased organizational citizenship behaviour, and decreased counterproductive work behaviour (Martin et al., 2016).

Seeing that the quality of work relations can impact positive organizational outcomes, it seems necessary to investigate what contributes to the development of positive workplace relationships. However, while outcomes of LMX have been extensively studied, antecedents of LMX have received less attention in psychological research. This paper aims to examine possible antecedents of LMX, utilizing two basic concepts of social perceptions: agency and communion (Judd et al., 2005).

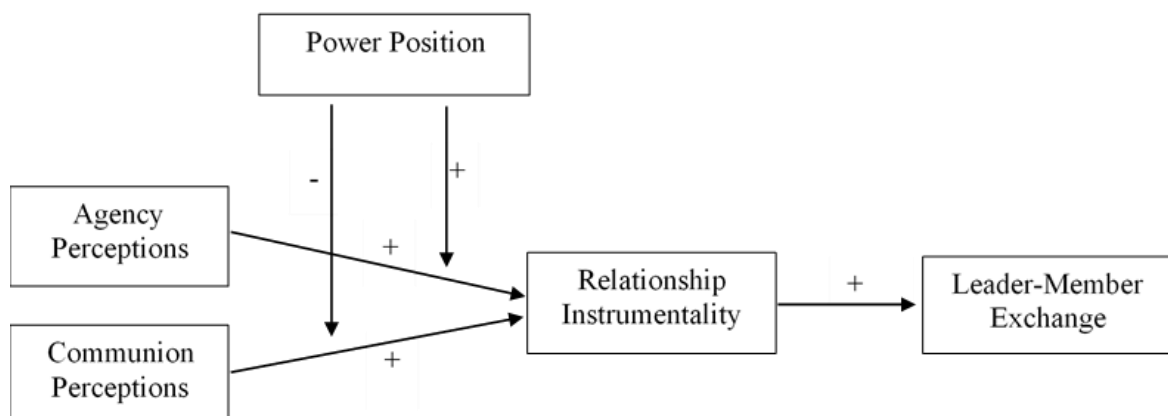
According to the Big Two theory, people form rapid judgments about each other based on two social perceptions, namely agency and communion (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Cuddy et al., 2011). Agency refers to the skill and competence of a person, whereas communion represents how warm and trustworthy a person is perceived (Fiske et al., 2007). Past research has linked agency to respect and communion to the liking of other people in an organizational context (Oleszkiewicz & Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2016), therefore both perceptions appear to be important for work relationships. However, the question prevails

which perception is more influential. On the one hand, research has shown that communion perceptions are more important in the judgment of others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Asch, 1946), which is mirrored in the assumed primacy effect of communion (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). On the other hand, there is evidence supporting agency perceptions to be more important in the organizational context (Nauts et al., 2014; Rudman & Glick, 1999). This finding can be explained by Social Exchange theory, which assumes that relationships develop based on mutually beneficial exchanges (Blau, 1986). Overall, agency perceptions could be more valuable for these exchanges than communion perceptions.

Which perception is more important for positive workplace relations might also depend on the person’s hierarchical position. Cislak (2013) found, that managers rate the importance of agency perceptions higher than subordinates. A possible explanation for this effect is, that managers and subordinates judge different perceptions as more instrumental to their needs. According to the people-as-means approach on social relationships, relationships can fulfill certain goals of the individuals, who perceive these traits in others (Orehek, Forest, & Barbaro, 2018) and managers and subordinates assign different weights to different goals (Gruenfeld et al., 2008).

Figure 1

Research model



This difference in preferences might ultimately affect what kind of behaviours managers and subordinates value in their work relationships, meaning that different, possibly conflicting, behaviours contribute towards positive work relationships for the two groups. This research aims to examine which perception is more influential in the organizational context in terms of LMX and which explanatory mechanisms play a role in this relationship. The full research model is displayed in Figure 1.

Leader-Member Exchange

One of the most important theories regarding interactions between managers and their subordinates is LMX. The concept of LMX was first introduced under the name vertical dyad linkage approach by Dansereau et al. (1975) and has been a commonly used tool in organizational psychological research ever since. The key proposition of LMX is that managers develop unique relationships with each subordinate based on different types of exchanges. Dansereau et al. (1975) distinguished between high and low LMX relationships. The first one is characterized by mutual trust, a high level of information exchange, support, and reciprocal influence. The latter entails a purely economic relationship, in which relationship parameters are limited to what is specified in the employment contract of both parties (Dansereau et al., 1975).

It is crucial to investigate how and why some relationships develop towards a high and others towards a low LMX relationship. In LMX, it is assumed that characteristics and behaviours of individuals occupying the higher hierarchical position (i.e., managers opposed to subordinates) have a bigger impact on the quality and development of the relationship than the other way around (Dansereau et al., 1975). A meta-analysis by Dulebohn et al. (2012) yielded supportive evidence for this assumption. Additionally, the same meta-analysis found evidence supporting that manager's contingent reward behaviours, transformational leadership, agreeableness, and extraversion predicted high LMX relationships. Furthermore,

Dulebohn et al. (2012) found managers' communal traits to be important for LMX, as subordinates' affect and liking for their managers predicted high LMX relationships.

From the subordinates' perspective, Dulebohn et al. (2012) found their agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness to be influential for LMX relationships. Additionally, subordinates' competence seemed to be crucial for the development of high LMX relationships, as managers' perceived competence and expectations regarding the success of their subordinates were predictors of LMX. Another study found that proactive behaviours on the side of the subordinate in a Chinese sample were positively connected to high LMX relationships (Xu et al., 2019). Furthermore, the compatibility between the manager and the subordinate in terms of demographics influenced the formation of LMX relationships (Duchon et al., 1986).

This body of research gives little guidance for managers and subordinates in terms of how to establish high LMX relationships. Therefore, this paper aims at investigating the interpersonal processes underlying LMX relationships. Because of the complex social reality of interpersonal relationships and varying environmental contexts in the organizational field, it seems beneficial to study the antecedents of LMX in terms of broader constructs as they are less bound to specific situations and work environments. Such constructs are the two basic concepts of social perception: agency and communion of the Big Two theory (Judd et al., 2005). An advantage of agency and communion is that people might be able to change their behaviour in terms of these constructs (Ely & Meyerson, 2010), leading to the possibility of behavioural advice for managers and subordinates in the workforce.

Agency and Communion Perceptions at the Workplace

The Big Two theory proposes that a lot of social perception, cognition, and judgment can be based on two key perceptions: The perceived agency and communion of another person. This basic distinction goes back to a classic study conducted by Asch (1946), in

which participants were asked to form impressions of another person based on a very limited set of attributes. The impressions participants formed were strongly influenced by attributes belonging to the category of either warm or cold personality traits. Since then this distinction has been verified repeatedly in social cognition (Bruckmüller & Abele, 2013), perception of the self and others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), and even across different cultures (Abele et al., 2008).

The implications of agency and communion perceptions in the organizational context have already received attention in psychological research. Oleszkiewicz and Lachowicz-Tabaczek (2016) predicted liking from communion perceptions and respect from agency perceptions. Furthermore, Dulebohn et al. (2012) found a connection between subordinates' competence and manager's communal traits with LMX. This shows, that both constructs have critical implications for the interaction of individuals at work. However, what remains unclear is the reverse effect meaning subordinates' communal traits and managers' agentic traits and their association with LMX.

Another unanswered question is which perception might be more influential in terms of LMX. On the one hand, the primacy effect of the Big Two theory proposes, that people first focus on their perception of the communion of another person (Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011). Numerous studies provide empirical evidence supporting this (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Asch, 1946; Leach et al., 2007; Ybarra et al., 2001). Following a deduction rooted in evolutionary psychology, Fiske et al. (2007) argue that the primacy effect of communion is crucial for judging if another person has harmful intentions. This perception is more important for one's survival than appraising a person as competent. Breaking this down to the workplace, the perception of communion should be more important, as it provides information about possibly harmful intentions of a manager, subordinate, or co-worker.

On the other hand, it might be the case that the workplace is a special environment which frames perceptions of agency to be more important than in other contexts (Cuddy et al., 2011). This notion is supported by research findings considering the impact of perceived agency on hiring decisions in a laboratory experiment (Rudman & Glick, 1999).

Additionally, Nauts et al. (2014) attempted to replicate the study by Asch (1946). Unlike that first study, however, the authors did not find a primacy effect of communion. Instead, agency seemed to be more influential in shaping impressions.

Social Exchange theory can be utilized to explain these findings. The theory assumes that social interactions are based on economic social exchanges in which people try to maximize their gains. Further, relationships between individuals form as a consequence of a series of beneficial mutual exchanges (Blau, 1986; Mitchell et al., 2012). It follows logically, that the perceived agency of an interaction partner could be crucial in the relationship formation at work. If the interaction partner is not competent in his or her work position, this makes beneficial exchanges less likely.

This paper will expand on the existing research and examine the impact of agency and communion perceptions of both managers and subordinates on LMX and which perception is overall more influential. This leads to the investigation of the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Communion perceptions are assumed to predict high LMX relationships.

Hypothesis 2: Agency perceptions are assumed to predict high LMX relationships.

Hypothesis 3: In line with Social Exchange theory, agency perceptions are assumed to be a stronger predictor of LMX relationships than communion perceptions.

The Moderating Role of Power Position

People take different hierarchical positions within a company, which might affect their interaction with people in other positions. One distinction that can be made is between

managers and subordinates, or in other words, between people with more or less power. This difference will be referred to as power position. People in high power positions have been of interest in psychological research as they are assumed to influence the performance of individuals, teams, and whole organizations (Ceri-Booms et al., 2017). Historically, there has been a shift from valuing only agency perceptions in the workplace to valuing communion perceptions as well (Chemers, 1997; Eagly & Carli, 2007), as research has shown the beneficial effects of communion perceptions. This includes the stimulation of subordinates' collaborative work behaviour by managers who displayed communal traits (Gartzia & van Knippenberg, 2016).

Regarding a possible difference between managers and subordinates, the previously mentioned meta-analysis by Dulebohn et al. (2012) reported managers' communion and subordinates' as antecedents of LMX. However, it remains unclear if the reverse effect has been investigated, too. Providing experimental evidence for a difference, Cislak (2013) investigated the influence of agency and communion perceptions in the workplace by manipulating participants' perception of being either in a managerial or subordinate position. The study found that participants in a high power position were more interested in agentic traits of future employees than participants in a low power position. Additionally, individuals in high power positions were less interested in the communal traits of their subordinates than participants in the low power position (Cislak, 2013). This study clearly shows that there are differences between managers and subordinates regarding the perceived importance of agency and communion in a work setting.

The question remains, if this difference in assigned importance also translates into the perceived quality of a work relationship, as Cislak (2013) did not include any measures of relationship quality. This lack in the scientific literature is addressed in this paper.

Specifically, this study proposes, that perceptions of managers and subordinates along the

agency and communion dimensions will shape their interaction in the workplace in terms of LMX with power position moderating this relationship.

Hypothesis 4: Power position moderates the relationship between both agency and communion perceptions of managers and subordinates and LMX, such that perceiving communion in their leader's behaviour influences subordinates' LMX and agency perceptions of their subordinates are more influential for leaders' ratings of LMX.

Relationship Instrumentality: an Explanatory Mechanism

Next to investigating the existence of a certain effect, it is also important to research the explanatory mechanisms causing an effect. According to the people-as-means approach to social relations, people can contribute to individuals' goal pursuit in different ways, such as by knowledge sharing, providing emotional support or encouragement (Orehek, Forest, & Barbaro, 2018). This is captured by the concept of relationship instrumentality. A relationship is high in instrumentality if it helps to fulfill a person's goals or needs (Orehek & Forest, 2016). While knowledge sharing can be framed as agentic behaviour, emotional support and encouragement fall in the category of communion. This way, both agency and communion perceptions can be viewed as instrumental to a relationship. The difference in the importance of agency and communion perceptions in managers and subordinates can be explained by the different goals the two parties might have in their relationships.

Considering the managers' perspective, according to Gruenfeld, et al. (2008), people in high power positions objectified their subordinates in terms of their goals. These observations are based on the power approach theory, which proposes, that social power increases people's approach tendencies leading them to focus more on stimuli, which would help satisfy one of their active goals (Keltner et al., 2003). Combined with the findings of Cislak (2013), this could suggest that managers pay more attention to agentic traits of their subordinates because they perceive them as more instrumental.

Regarding the subordinates' perspective, Thacker and Stoner (2012) found both socializing outside of work and providing direct job-related assistance to be predictive of employees' help-seeking behaviour, with socializing outside of work being the dominant predictor. The authors explained this with the positive effects both behaviours have on employees' LMX relationships with their managers. When framing socializing outside of work as a communal behaviour and providing direct job-related support as agentic behaviour, communion perceptions seem to be more important to subordinates. This could suggest that communion perceptions are more instrumental to subordinates than agency perceptions, as they provide a certain feeling of safety to approach their manager for help.

In romantic relationships, the perceived instrumentality of a relationship has been repeatedly connected to relationship satisfaction (Cappuzzello & Gere, 2018; Orehek & Forest, 2016; Orehek, Forest, & Wingrove, 2018), meaning that the instrumentality of a relationship contributes to the quality of that relationship. Additionally, Orehek et al. (2019) found that perceived co-worker instrumentality was positively related to four indicators of positive work relationships: greater interpersonal closeness, relationship satisfaction, willingness to provide social support, and reduced workplace incivility. This suggests that the instrumentality of a work relationship is linked to indicators of positive workplace relations. This paper will look at relationships in the organizational context and investigate if the perceived instrumentality of a relationship mediates the association between agency and communion perceptions and LMX.

Hypothesis 5: The relationships between both agency and communion perceptions of managers and subordinates with LMX are mediated through relationship instrumentality, such that leaders view agency perceptions in their subordinates as more instrumental, and subordinates view communion perceptions in their managers as more instrumental.

Method

Participants

In total, 161 dyads of subordinates and managers took part in this study. Three participants without data on the outcome variable were excluded resulting in a total of 319 participants, of which 160 individuals were managers (50.2%) and 159 participants were subordinates (49.8%). All participants were working in the Netherlands and spoke Dutch fluently. The mean age was 34.8 years with a minimum of 17 years and a maximum of 67 years ($SD = 12.27$). There were 144 females (47.5%) and 149 males (45.7%) in the dataset. The most frequent working hours per week were 33 to 40 hours (31.6%), more than 40 hours (22.1%), and 25 to 32 hours (18.4%). The top three levels of education were MBO (28.8%), HBO (25.8%), and WO (13.2%). The dyads had worked together for over 5 years (22.4%), between two and five years (18.4%), or between one and two years (22.1%). Regarding contact at work, most dyads saw each other often (39.6%), followed by seeing each other regularly (25.2%), and very often (21.8%).

Procedure

Data collection took place between January and March 2020 as part of a larger collaborative field study. Data was collected using two different printed questionnaires. One version was adapted for the subordinates, the other version was tailored to the managers. Different companies were approached to recruit managers and subordinates, who were working together. When both parties agreed to participate, they were provided with the printed questionnaires in an envelope. Inside that envelope, the questionnaires for managers and subordinates were again put into separate envelopes to make sure that neither party could see the other's questionnaire. Printed versions were used instead of an online questionnaire to ensure participants' confidentiality. The matching between the information provided by the

manager and those provided by the subordinate was secured by providing and collecting the questionnaires in one envelope.

First, participants were informed about the study and were asked to give their written consent. The manager's questionnaire started with scales consisting of items asking about the managers' opinions of the subordinate. This included the agency and communion perceptions and perceptions about the relationship instrumentality. Then, participants were asked to answer the items of the LMX scale. Lastly, there were a few items concerning the participant's demographics, such as the participant's age, gender, educational level, and working hours per week. The questionnaires for the subordinates included the same scales, however, all items were adapted, so that they were asking about the subordinate's perceptions about their manager.

Measures

Leader-Member Exchange

The multidimensional LMX scale developed by Liden and Maslyn (1998) consisting of 11 items was used. All items for the leaders' perspective are included in the Appendix in the English version. Translation and back-translation were used to develop the Dutch version. The answer format for this scale was a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Initially, the reliability of this scale was low ($\alpha = .75$). When removing one item (My subordinate defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.), the reliability increased ($\alpha = .84$), with similar reliabilities for the separate groups of managers ($\alpha = .83$) and subordinates ($\alpha = .84$).

Agency perceptions

This concept was assessed using the ability subscale of the trust content scale developed by Mayer and Davis (1999). Again, translation and back translation was used to develop a Dutch version of the scales. The answer format was a 5-point Likert scale (1 =

strongly disagree, 5 = *strongly agree*). Overall, the items had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$). Reliabilities between managers ($\alpha = .86$) and subordinates ($\alpha = .89$) were similar.

Communion perceptions

Communion was assessed using the benevolence and integrity subscales of the trust content scale developed by Mayer and Davis (1999). The complete scale can be found in the Appendix. The items had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$) with similar reliabilities for managers; ($\alpha = .91$) and subordinates; ($\alpha = .92$).

Perceived Relationship instrumentality

To assess the perceived instrumentality of work relationships, seven items of the perceived partner instrumentality scale developed by Orehek, Forest, and Wingrove (2018) were used, adapted to the organizational context of this study. The English version of all items from the subordinate's perspective is included in the Appendix. Translation and back translation was used for developing of a Dutch version. An answer format with 11 points was used ranging from "Not important at all" to "Very important". The scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$), as well as for managers ($\alpha = .95$) and subordinates ($\alpha = .96$).

Control variable

Contact time (i.e., how often managers and subordinates see each other at work) revealed a positive correlation with LMX in the preliminary analysis. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between communion and contact time. Managers and subordinates who see each other more often at work could form different, perhaps more accurate, impressions of one another. In line with this, Thomas et al. (2019) found that task interdependence influenced the importance of agency and communion perceptions for dyadic viability (i.e., the ability of a dyad to work together successfully). Task interdependence and contact time are not identical, but linked constructs. Therefore, contact time was included as a control variable in the analysis.

Analysis

Preliminary correlation analysis and regression analysis were used to examine the data. The statistical software SPSS and PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) were used. Model 2 was used for the main effects and the moderation effect of power position. Agency and communion were entered as moderators to be able to include both predictors into the same model. Model 7 was run to assess the mediation effect of relationship instrumentality in the relation of both agency and communion perceptions and LMX moderated by power position.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlations are included in Table 1. LMX was significantly related to agency, communion, and relationship instrumentality. Additionally, LMX was positively related to contact time. Agency and communion were positively correlated, as well as agency and relationship instrumentality, and communion and relationship instrumentality.

Table 1

Pearson correlations coefficients, Means, and Standard Deviations

	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) LMX	3.96	.57							
(2) Agency	4.33	.57	.45**						
(3) Communion	4.31	.57	.57**	.62**					
(4) RI	8.32	2.09	.25**	.16**	.19**				
(5) Age	34.8	12.27	.02	-.06	.01	.06			
(6) Work years			.03	.03	-.02	.08	.26**		
(7) Contact time			.23**	.07	.14*	.11	-.02	.17**	

Note. RI refers to relationship instrumentality, work years refers to the number of years manager and subordinate worked together. N = 250-319. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

As a next step, the assumptions for regression analysis were checked. Since this is a dyadic data set, there was reason to assume a violation of independence. In line with a violation, there was a correlation between the LMX ratings of the managers with those of the subordinates ($r = .38, p < .001$). Considering the histogram of the standardized residuals and the normal probability plot, there was no evidence for a violation of normality. A scatterplot between the unstandardized residuals and LMX revealed no violation of linearity. Regrading homoscedasticity, a scatter plot between predicted values and residuals showed equal variance, however, values seemed to accumulate towards the right end of the scale. All VIF statistics were under the cut-off score of four, suggesting no problem with multicollinearity. Three cases (one subordinate and two managers) qualified as outliers, as their studentized residuals were outside the range of \pm three. Considering Cook's distance and the outliers' leverage, one outlier seemed to have a strong influence on the sample and was excluded from the analysis, $LEV = .13, COOK = .67$. Additionally, a post hoc sensitivity power analysis revealed that this sample yields 100% power to detect an effect size of $f = .35$.

Hypothesis Testing

Main and moderation effects

First, PROCESS analysis, model 2 (Hayes, 2013), was run to test Hypothesis 1 to Hypothesis 4. The results are displayed in Table 2. Supporting Hypothesis 1, communion perceptions were a positive predictor of LMX. Hypothesis 2 was supported as well, as agency perceptions had a positive effect on LMX. However, the findings were not in line with Hypothesis 3, which assumed that, overall, agency perceptions would have a stronger effect than communion on LMX. Turning to Hypothesis 4, the interaction effect of power position and agency, as well as the interaction effect between power position and communion, were both nonsignificant. This model explained 39% of variance in LMX, $F(6,290) = 30.85, p < .001$.

Table 2*Coefficients table*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Constant	3.57	.12	31.14	< .001	3.35, 3.80
Power Position	-.02	.03	-.59	.557	-.07, .04
Communion	.24	.03	7.06	< .001	.18, .31
PP x C	.01	.03	.07	.943	-.07, .07
Agency	.14	.03	4.18	< .001	.08, .21
PP x A	-.04	.03	-1.09	.277	-.10, .03
Contact Time	.10	.03	3.33	.001	.04, .16

Note. PP x C is the interaction of power position and communion perceptions, PP x A is the interaction effect of power position and agency perceptions.

Moderated mediation effects

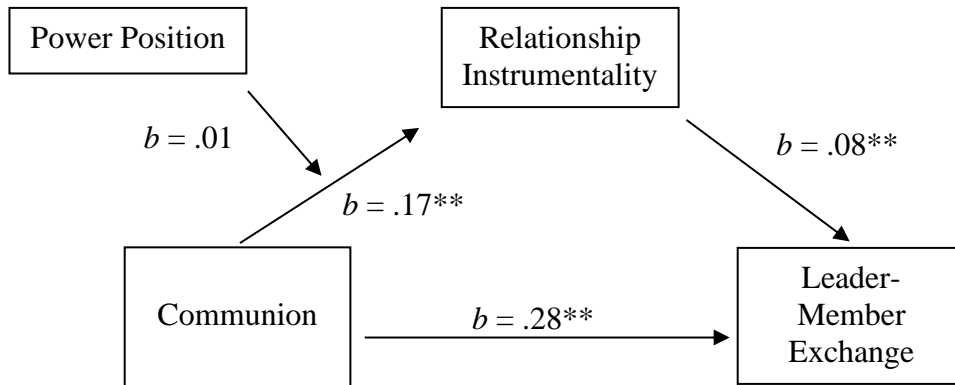
Communion. PROCESS analysis model 7 (Hayes, 2013) was run to investigate the mediation effect of relationship instrumentality between perceptions of communion and LMX conditional on power position. This model explained 34.5% of the variance in LMX, $F(3,290) = 50.85, p < .001$. While there was a significant conditional indirect effect for subordinates, for managers the conditional indirect effect was nonsignificant. The index of moderated mediation did not support power position as a moderator in the effect of communion on relationship instrumentality. Concerning communion, Hypothesis 5 was not supported. The results are displayed in Figure 2.

Agency. The same moderated mediation model including agency explained 29% of the variance in LMX, $F(3,290) = 39.05, p < .001$. Again, there was a significant indirect effect for subordinates, but a nonsignificant effect for managers. The conditional effect of

power position on agency and relationship instrumentality was nonsignificant. This contradicted Hypothesis 5 with regards to agency. Results are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 2

Mediation effect of relationship instrumentality between communion and LMX.

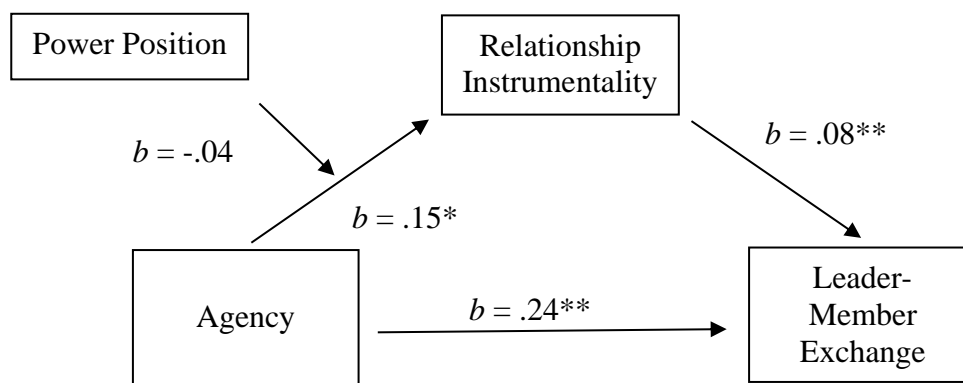


Note. Direct effect, $b = .28$, $SE = .03$, $t(290) = 10.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = (.23, .34).

Conditional indirect effects for managers, $b = .01$, $Boot SE = .01$, $Boot 95\% CI = (-.01, .03)$ and subordinates, $b = .01$, $Boot SE = .01$, $Boot 95\% CI = (.01, .03)$. Index of moderated mediation, $Index = .01$, $Boot SE = .01$, $Boot 95\% CI = (-.02, .02)$. $p < .05$; * $p < .01$; **

Figure 3.

Mediation effect of relationship instrumentality between agency and LMX.



Note. Direct effect, $b = .24$, $SE = .03$, $t(290) = 8.66$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = (.19, .30).

Conditional Indirect effects for managers, $b = .01$, $Boot SE = .01$, $Boot 95\% CI = (-.01, .03)$ and subordinates, $b = .02$, $Boot SE = .01$, $Boot 95\% CI = (.01, .05)$. Index of moderated mediation, $Index = -.01$, $Boot SE = .01$, $Boot 95\% CI = (-.04, .02)$. $p < .05$; * $p < .01$; **

Post Hoc Analysis

The assumption of independence was violated; therefore, the analysis was repeated with managers and subordinates as separate samples. First, perceptions of agency and communion were entered into a regression model predicting LMX controlling for contact time. From the managers perspective, the model explained 31% of the variance in LMX, $F(3,149) = 21.99, p < .001$. The effect of agency perception on LMX was positive and marginally significant $b = .11, SE_b = .05, t(149) = 2.03, p = .044$. Communion was a positive predictor of LMX, $b = .25, SE_b = .05, t(149) = 4.57, p < .001$. Regarding the mediation effect of relationship instrumentality between communion and LMX, PROCESS model 4 revealed a nonsignificant indirect effect, $b = .01, Boot SE = .01, Boot 95\% CI = (-.01, .04)$. Lastly, the mediation effect of relationship instrumentality on perceptions of agency and LMX was not significant either, $b = .01, Boot SE = .01, Boot 95\% CI = (-.01, .03)$.

For the subordinates perspective, the regression model explained 47% of the variance in LMX, $F(3,140) = 42.09, p < .001$. The effect of agency perceptions on LMX was positive, $b = .18, SE_b = .04, t(140) = 4.09, p < .001$. Communion perceptions were a positive predictor of LMX, $b = .24, SE_b = .04, t(140) = 5.43, p < .001$. Again, PROCESS model 4 was used to assess the mediation effect of relationship instrumentality in both the relationships of agency and communion perceptions and LMX. The indirect effect for the model with communion was significant, $b = .02, Boot SE = .01, Boot 95\% CI = (.01, .05)$. The mediation effect for agency was significant, too, $b = .03, Boot SE = .03, Boot 95\% CI = (.01, .06)$.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate agency and communion perceptions as antecedents of LMX. Assuming that the work environment frames agency to be more salient, perceptions of agency were assumed to be the stronger predictor. Both relationships were hypothesized to be moderated by the power position of the individual. Relationship instrumentality was included

as an explanatory mechanism, meaning that agency and communion perceptions were assumed to be instrumental to the perceiver, depending on their power position.

The findings of the study support perceptions of agency and communion as predictors of high LMX relationships, thus supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. This is in line with research finding both perceptions to be influential in social cognition (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Bruckmüller & Abele, 2013; Judd et al., 2005). Additionally, Oleszkiewicz and Lachowicz-Tabaczek (2016) found that while agency and communion perceptions were predictive of respect and liking, respectively, they also jointly predicted trust in the workplace. As high LMX relationships are characterized by a high level of mutual trust (Dansereau et al., 1975), the current findings nicely expand on the previous study. Additionally, finding both perceptions to be influential for subordinates' LMX relationship adds towards the historical shift from only valuing agency perceptions to considering communal traits of leaders as well (Chemers, 1997; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Hypothesis 3 assumed that, compared to communion, agency perceptions would be the better predictor of LMX. However, this was not supported by the data. Considering the whole sample and the separate groups of managers and subordinates, communion had a stronger influence on LMX than agency, supporting the primacy effect of communion. A possible explanation for not finding the hypothesized effect is that the participants had high levels of contact time. This indicates a high level of interdependence which, according to Thomas et al. (2019), is associated with a focus on communion perceptions. Given the low variability in contact time, including it as a control variable might not have been enough to rule out its effects.

Turning to Hypothesis 4, power position was not supported by the data as a moderator in the relationship between both agency and communion perceptions and LMX, suggesting that there is no difference between managers and subordinates in terms of what is important

to them in their work relationships. When analyzing the two groups separately, perceptions of communion had a similar influence on LMX ratings in managers and subordinates. However, perceptions of agency from the managers' perspective were only marginally significant, while they were more important in terms of subordinates' LMX. This indicates that there are in fact differences between managers and subordinates. The question of whether these differences are strong enough to be of relevance needs further research.

It is surprising, that this study did not find stronger evidence for power position as a moderator. The current findings are not in line with the meta-analytic evidence provided by Dulebohn et al. (2012) and the experimental evidence of Cislak (2013), as both sources suggest power position as a moderator in the relationships between agency and communion perceptions and LMX. Assuming Cislak's (2013) experimental evidence translates to the real world, the study might have failed to find support for power position as a moderator due to the violation of independence. This could have distorted the results. Additionally, the Netherlands is characterized by a low degree of power distance (Hofstede, 2001). In countries with a higher degree of power distance, the differences between managers and subordinates are stronger. Therefore, power position might affect the importance of agency and communion perceptions in terms of LMX to a greater extent than in this sample.

Concerning Hypothesis 5, the data did not support a moderated mediation effect of relationship instrumentality conditional on power position for both agency and communion perceptions and LMX. Interestingly, in the main analysis, the conditional indirect effects for managers and subordinates show different results. The indirect effects for agency and communion perceptions are significant for subordinates but not for managers. This difference, however, was not strong enough to show a significant effect of moderated mediation. Considering the separate groups, a similar pattern was found, as relationship instrumentality was a significant partial mediator in the subordinates' sample for both

perceptions and LMX, but not in the managers' sample. This shows that in the manager sample, processes other than relationship instrumentality mediate the influence of both social perceptions on LMX. Regarding the subordinates, the found effects were not in the hypothesized direction, as agency was a better predictor of relationship instrumentality compared to communion. Overall, these results must be viewed cautiously, as relationship instrumentality mediated only a small part in the relation of both perceptions and LMX, suggesting that there are other explanatory mechanisms at work.

Additionally, relationship instrumentality was not a strong predictor of LMX which is surprising given the strong effects found by Orehek et al. (2019) regarding perceived co-worker instrumentality and four outcome variables. Drawing upon LMX theory and its previously found outcomes, LMX seems to be related to the four outcome variables interpersonal closeness, relationship satisfaction, willingness to provide social support, and reduced workplace incivility (Dansereau et al., 1975; Martin et al., 2016). One possibility is that there are differences in the perceptions between managers and subordinates and co-workers in terms of instrumentality. This needs to be addressed in future research.

Theoretical Implications

This study aimed at validating two theories in the organizational context: the primacy effect of communion and Social Exchange theory. Considering the results, the primacy effect of communion was supported, as communion perceptions were the more influential factor on LMX. This is in line with the findings of, among others, Asch (1946), Abele and Bruckmüller (2011), and Ybarra et al. (2001). However, it contradicts the notion that the organizational context frames agency perceptions as more important, which was supported by laboratory experiments finding agency to be more important in the formation of impressions (Nauts et al., 2014) and for hiring decisions (Rudman & Glick, 1999). While the laboratory might work

as an environment framing agency perceptions to be more important, this study could not support this notion in the real world.

However, these findings do not indicate, that Social Exchange theory has been falsified in the organizational context. Strictly speaking, Social Exchange theory proposes that relationships form because of beneficial mutual exchanges (Blau, 1986). It was assumed that behaviors and traits from the agentic dimension would make a valuable, mutual exchange more likely, compared to communion. It appears both perceptions of agency and communion contribute towards a positive mutual exchange, thus resulting in a positive work relationship. Assuming that only one of the two perceptions is enough for a positive work relationship might be short-sighted and disregarding the complexity of social relationships.

Practical Implications

How should managers and subordinates behave at work to ensure positive relationships with their supervisors or subordinates? According to the results of this research, there is no disagreement between the preferences of managers and subordinates regarding social perceptions, which could have resulted in conflicts. Both managers and subordinates should strive to display behaviors of both categories, possibly with a focus on communal behaviors. Furthermore, Thomas et al. (2019) found that in teams with low interdependence agency perceptions became more important, while in teams with high interdependence communal traits were more important. Therefore, the display of agentic and communal behaviors should be adjusted to the level of interdependence with the other person.

Displaying communion can be achieved by behaving in a warm and supportive way. This includes providing emotional support, socializing, and helping coworkers, subordinates, and managers beyond one's job responsibilities. Since agency is linked to the perceived intelligence and skill of a person, ensuring high work performance and providing task-related assistance could help to display agency. Future research should investigate which behaviors

convey one or both of the social perceptions most effectively. For individuals in management positions, this means employing leadership styles such as transformational leadership, as they combine both communal and agentic behaviors (Cuddy et al., 2011). Since relationship instrumentality seemed to be a mediator in the subordinate sample, managers should focus on what kind of behaviour might be most helpful in terms of the goals of the subordinate.

From the perspective of the organization, it can be helpful to promote the display of communal traits, especially in male-dominated fields. This can be done by using workshops educating about the principals of social perceptions and how it affects relationships at work. Another possibility is to enhance the supportiveness of the organizational environment for the display of communal behavior. By changing organizational policy and establishing a focus on work safety, a communal goal, Ely and Meyerson (Ely & Meyerson, 2010) found that men on offshore oil platforms were enabled to engage in more communal behaviors, such as openly attending to their own and others' feelings. This work environment might be an extreme case that is not generalizable to other organizations, however, it highlights, how organizational norms impact the behavior of the individual worker.

Limitations, Strengths, and Future Research

One aforementioned limitation of this study is a violation of independence. Therefore, the statistical results should be considered with caution, as findings might be less reliable and distorted because of the violation. However, the results of the post hoc analysis revealed similar findings as to the main analysis, which ensures some confidence in the results. Additionally, this study is based on correlational evidence, which gives rise to the directionality problem. A laboratory experiment could help to establish a causal link between perceptions of agency and communion and LMX. This might be an interesting topic for future research.

Regarding the strengths of this study, the number of participants ensured high power and the data was collected in the field, which results in more reliability and better generalizability compared to laboratory experiments. Additionally, this paper investigated LMX as a unidimensional construct, which can be seen both as a strength and a weakness. As in the case of Dansereau et al. (1975), LMX has often been studied in terms of a binary, unidimensional construct (i.e., either high or low LMX relationships). However, one criticism of LMX is that it should be measured as a multidimensional construct. (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Answering to that criticism, Liden and Maslyn (1998) developed an approach to LMX including different facets. The authors argue that distinguishing between these facets will lead to a better understanding of the interactions managers and subordinates engage in. However, as all facets of LMX should be equally important for high-quality at work, this paper used LMX as one construct instead of investigating each facet separately. This also helped to keep the model parsimonious and to prevent capitalization of chance. Nonetheless, it might be an interesting line of research to investigate the influence of agency and communion perceptions on the distinct facets of LMX.

While this study looked at the effects of agency and communion perceptions in terms of dyadic effects, it might also be interesting to investigate this at a team level. In reality, there are more than two individuals involved in many work tasks, and team members might influence each other in their perceptions of and relationship with the manager. Additionally, the binary distinction between managers and subordinates does not correspond to reality. Companies have hierarchical structures with multiple levels; therefore, most individuals will incorporate both managerial and subordinate positions. The reciprocal influence of different roles is an interesting line of research considering the whole network of an organization.

Another question for future research is how agency and communion perceptions jointly predict LMX. Future studies should take the interaction of the two perceptions into

account. This is based on the observation that there seems to be a trade-off between agency and communion in the judgment of another person, such that if one perception tends to be high, the other perception seems to be lower (Judd et al., 2005). There is also the possibility that too much of one perception might lead to a decrease in relationship quality, therefore a curvilinear effect should be considered in future research.

When considering perceptions of agency and communion, one important factor is gender. There is a similarity between the classic female stereotype and communal traits and also an overlap between agentic traits and the classic male stereotype (Suh, 2003). Women who display agentic traits at work, seem to experience workplace incivility more often than other women, which would indicate less positive relations at work (Gabriel et al., 2018). Considering these findings, gender should be investigated as a moderator in the effect of both agency and communion perceptions and LMX.

Conclusion

Positive workplace relations are of crucial importance for the performance of organizations and the well-being of employees. This research has shown, that both agency and communion perceptions are influential in terms of high LMX relationships. Supporting the primacy effect of communion in the organizational context, communion perceptions were more influential in terms of LMX. However, perceptions of agency were important too and should not be neglected, especially since there are factors such as task interdependence affecting the relative importance of agency and communion perceptions. Future research is needed to investigate explanatory mechanisms linking both social perceptions and LMX, as relationship instrumentality only mediated a small proportion of the effect of both social perceptions and LMX in the subordinate sample. For both managers and subordinates, it seems important to display both agentic (e.g., task-related support) and communal (e.g., emotional support) types of behaviors to help create high LMX relationships and thus achieve

the benefits outlined as the outcomes of high LMX relationships. This way it might be possible to prevent subordinates from quitting their jobs because of their managers.

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Appendix

Study measures

1. LMX: (Liden & Maslyn, 1998)

I like my subordinate very much as a person.

My subordinate is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend.

My subordinate is a lot of fun to work with.

My subordinate defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.

My subordinate would come to my defence if I were "attacked" by others.

My subordinate would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake.

I offer to do work for my subordinate that goes beyond my role.

I am willing to apply extra efforts for my subordinate, beyond those normally required.

I am impressed with my subordinate's knowledge of his/ her job.

I respect my subordinate's knowledge and competence on the job.

I admire my subordinate's professional skills.

2. Warmth and Competence: Ability, Benevolence, Integrity scale (Mayer & Davis, 1999)

My subordinate is very capable of performing his/her job.

My subordinate is known to be successful at the things he/she tries to do.

My subordinate has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done.

I feel very confident about my subordinate's skills.

My subordinate has specialized capabilities that can increase our performance.

My subordinate is well qualified.

My subordinate is very concerned about my welfare.

My needs and desires are very important to my subordinate.

My subordinate would not knowingly do anything to hurt me.

My subordinate really looks out for what is important to me.

My subordinate will go out of his/her way to help me.

My subordinate has a strong sense of justice.

I never have to wonder whether my subordinate will stick to his/her word.

My subordinate tries hard to be fair in dealings with others.

I like my subordinate's values.

Sound principles seem to guide my subordinate's behaviour.

3. Perceived Partner Instrumentality Scale (Orehek, Forest, & Wingrove, 2018)

Please answer the following questions about your supervisor. We are interested in how your supervisor affects your pursuit of your goals (i.e., goals to do well in general as well as specific goals, like doing well on an upcoming work project).

Please answer the following questions. It is a little tricky to understand, so please read carefully.

Please indicate how much your supervisor helps or harms your pursuit of your goal.

A person is helpful to a goal if s/he makes it more likely that you will succeed. So, for example, a helpful person might be emotionally supportive or help you directly with that goal. A person is harmful to a goal if s/he makes it less likely that you will succeed. Note that being harmful for your goals doesn't mean that this person wants you to fail - simply that he or she makes it less likely that you will succeed.

Job Performance

Social Networking

Career Advancement

Personal Learning/Growth

Work Enjoyment

Good interpersonal relations (with supervisors, co-workers)

Job security