

Developing the Leader-Follower Relationship: Perceptions of Leaders and Followers

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Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory considers the impact that leaders and followers relationships have on an organization. This study was an investigation of the leader-follower relationship and the influence these relationships have on individual performance in an organization. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders and followers who had experienced the phenomenon. A qualitative research method and phenomenological design was employed for data collection and analysis to examine leaders and followers lived experiences. Twenty-three participants, comprising of seven leaders and sixteen followers, were interviewed using an in-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interview process. Data from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Analysis of the data identified collaborative relationship, partnership relationship, and engaged relationship as major contributors to the leader-follower relationship and the influence of the relationship on individual performance.

INTRODUCTION

As organizations endeavor to become more successful, leaders play a significant role in the way their followers devote their time, efforts, and commitment to, first of all, their job and secondly, how they extend their support to achieving organizational objectives. Studies of the leadership discipline acknowledge that the exchange of information forms the basis to high-quality relationships that exist within organizations (Brown & Moshavi, 2005; Pothos & Juola, 2007). Leaders can potentially inspire the actions of their followers by improving the quality of the leader-follower dyadic relationship (Graen, Cashman, Ginsburgh, & Schliemann, 1977). Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) affirmed that the quality of the dyadic relationship can impact individual performance. The relationship shared between leaders and followers in the workplace is significant in determining the levels of employee performance, satisfaction, retention, loyalty, and commitment (Shaw, 1997; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory considers the impact that leaders and followers relationships have on an organization. Harris and Kacmar (2006) affirmed that nearly all of the literature published on LMX expresses the possibility that high-quality relationships, typified by high levels of trust, increased communication channels, rewards, and favors, offer some positive benefits both to followers and the company where they are employed. Followers who have high LMX are typically more devoted and productive to their group and leader than followers who have low LMX (Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, & Yammarino, 2001). LMX instruction has been accepted as a preparation for effective leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991) and more often than not as a universal theory (Anderson, & Shivers, 1996).

Amid environmental changes, organizations benefit from developing leader-followers relationships through continued effective exchanges. Clear and unobstructed leader-follower exchanges (Senge, 2003) permeate and inculcate employee confidence (Weymes, 2005) and encourage outstanding individual performance (Adebayo & Udegbe, 2004; Densten, 2005). However, a frequently found condition in the life of an organization is bias and inequality in leader-follower relationships, through which certain individuals have a more positive relationship with their leader than others do. LMX is one vehicle for understanding and improving leader-follower relationships in an organization (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999).

Kouzes and Posner (2002) posited that organizational leaders are charged with the task of improving the performance and commitment within their organization. They posited that the shared values between leaders and followers and their organization can boost commitment, enhance collective performance, and develop employee loyalty. Leaders and followers are expected to model shared organizational values through ongoing relationships that drive performance and commitment to the organization. These relationships can be understood through the lens of LMX theory.

LMX theory, a relationship-based method for studying leader-follower relationships, has over the years produced some inconclusive results (Schriesheim, Chester, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999) even while affirming that the heart of the leadership practice is the dyadic relationship among leaders and followers (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Graen, 1976; Northouse, 2007). Furthermore, LMX theory focuses on the individualize relationships leaders develop with some individual employees and not with others (Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Gerstner & Day, 1997). The literature supports LMX relationships as exclusive and interpersonal.

LMX theory implies that leaders establish individualized relationships with their followers through the progression of ongoing work-related exchanges (Graen et al., 1977; Epitropaki & Martin, 2005; Greguras & Ford, 2006). The theory finds its roots in Dansereau et al. (1975) vertical dyadic linkage paradigm as an addition to social exchange theory (Epitropaki & Ford). It is primarily concerned with the significance and value of the shared relationship, vertical dyad or dyadic relationship (Suazo, Turnley, & Mai-Dalton, 2008) between the leader and his/her follower. The basis of the leader-member exchange is the idea of mutual trust and loyalty (Bass & Avolio, 2004). This idea emphasizes that leaders in communal or group cultures are entrusted with the task of taking care of their followers and followers, on the other hand, have an ethical and honest responsibility to respond with absolute respect and loyalty to their leaders (Bass & Avolio).

LMX theory finds its theoretical and empirical roots in both role theory (Liden et al., 1977; Katz & Kahn, 1978) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). The leader as well as the follower is required to perform a unique role within the organization (Katz & Kahn). According to Graen (1976), within an organization, employee roles are gradually accepted through informal exchanges that take place between the leader and his/her follower. Researchers (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Graen & Scandura, 1987) have posited that these roles progress due to the mutual agreement between the leader and follower assuming their role and the combined belief that the result will benefit both parties. Consequently, a level of confidence between the leader and his/her followers develops [Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975; Dienesch & Liden, 1986].

The exchange relationship is created on the basis of personal closeness and the subordinate's adequacy and devotedness (Graen & Cashman, 1975). Specifically, LMX theory has focused on the relation between quality leader-member exchanges and positive results for leaders, followers, and the organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Researchers have discovered that positive employee performance is a result of high-quality exchange relationships (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993; Graen & Uhl-Bien). Yukl (2006), however, recognized the limited number of studies done on situational conditions affecting the development of exchange relationships and suggested conducting research that will endeavor to discover the evolution of exchange relationships over time.

This research contributed to the emerging work pertaining to LMX relationships, which suggests that the quality of employee and direct supervisor relationships are connected to employee performance (Wayne & Green, 1993; Erdogan & Enders, 2007). If LMX quality moderates employee performance, it

seems imperative to understand how these relationships are formed, evolved, and influence individual performance. The study, therefore, proposed a focus on followers' commitment to their leaders as a means for improving overall job performance in an organization. A qualitative phenomenological theory was employed to understand the exchange relationships from the perspectives of leaders and followers in an organization and to understand how this exchange relationship influences individual performance. The primary research question for this study was: What constitutes the leader-follower relationship in an organization? Two sub-questions also assisted with investigating the phenomenon inherent in these experiences. The sub-questions comprised the following: How does this relationship impact or influence the performance of the leader and follower in that organization? How does the nature of the relationship evolve over time?

Campbell and Dardis (2004) affirmed that an understanding of leader-follower relationships and the influence these relationships have on followers' ability to achieve their goals is an essential contribution to leadership development skills. Beng-Chong and Ployhart (2004) posited that knowledge of the role high-quality dyadic relationships have on inspiring followers can increase a leader's probability of follower success. These high-quality relationships can potentially improve organizational results like performance, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover ratios (Brouthers, Gelderman, & Arens, 2007; Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). Moreover, the knowledge attained from understanding leader-follower relationships can assist leaders to shape the strategy of their organization (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003).

METHOD

Research Design Appropriateness

The purpose of this present study was to explore the lived experiences of exchange relationships between leaders and followers and to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of these leaders and followers. The social relations between leaders and followers have created an awareness to describe the richness and context of the experiences of the individuals involved in the relationship (Collingson, 2006; Covey, 2006). The quality of the relationship between leaders and followers is, instinctively, subjective with each individual having his/her viewpoints (Collingson; Vassallo, 2007) on its quality. Acquiring leaders and followers perspectives in the form of qualitative data facilitated the discovery of a phenomenon of the exchange relationship between leaders and followers. A qualitative research method and phenomenological approach helped in developing a fresh understanding of the phenomenon being studied as entailed in the exploration of the lived experiences of leaders and followers.

Qualitative research method is subjective and originates in exploring the way individuals interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It employs a realistic perspective to examine comprehensive human experiences (Creswell; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Researchers have agreed that a qualitative research method is inspirational in understanding the ontological perspectives of people in natural environments (Creswell; Ruane, 2004; Barbuto, 2005). Wilding and Whiteford (2005) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2005) affirmed that qualitative research is applicable to understanding the expectations of conflicting realities in relation to individual opinions.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that attempts to represent the lived experiences, opinions, and interpretations of the research participants (Simon, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It is an interpretive and practical approach and builds from human beings lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman). In phenomenology, creating meaning is accomplished by means of descriptive instruments since unbiased viewpoints cannot be efficiently captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Because phenomenology focuses on the descriptions of individual lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994), it does not endeavor to offer descriptions, hypotheses, interpretations, or assumptions concerning the phenomenon being studied (Wertz, 2005). According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological design aspires to comprehend various individuals' general or universal experience.

Participants

One government agency in an island of the Caribbean which employed approximately 600 permanent or full-time workers participated. The sample size for this study comprised twenty-three participants consisting of seven leaders and sixteen followers. The leaders and followers were not necessarily matched by one leader and that leader's followers. This process was used to ensure that conflict of interest among leaders and followers chosen for the study, although they may have a leader-follower relationship, was not violated. A criterion based purposive sampling approach was used to identify the sample size. Purposive criterion based sampling in a phenomenological study ascertains the individuals have experienced the phenomenon being studied and can provide a clear understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2007).

Instrumentation

One-on-one, semi-structured face-to-face interview sessions were conducted with each participant where they were required to answer specific interview questions. For this phenomenological study, open-ended, semi-structured questions was essential to obtain descriptions from the participants concerning the leader-follower relationship. A set of questions were developed for leader participants and another set of questions for follower participants. It was important to validate that the content of the interview questions was understandable, and to conduct a face-to-face authenticity test of the interview questions. In order to complete these tasks, a field test was conducted with four individuals who assessed the interview questions. These individuals comprised of two leader-participants and two follower-participants who were government employees. Each participant was required to sign an informed consent form to affirm their voluntary participation in the field study. These participants were selected because of their experience and understanding of the leader-follower relationship. They were not members of the organization where the actual study took place and, moreover, did not participate in the actual study. The interview questions were refined based on the feedback and recommendations obtained during the field test.

Leader participants were asked to respond to eleven questions concerning their perceptions of leader-follower relationships including: (1) "What is your overall concept of what the relationship between a leader and his/her follower should be like?", (2) "As a leader, what do you expect of your followers?", (3) "How do your followers contribute to the creation of your performance?", (4) "During the time you have been in a leadership role in this company, what has the experience of getting to know your followers been like?", (5) "What specific steps (if any) do you take to develop a relationship with your followers?", (6) "In your own words, how can an individual leader build relationships with his followers?", (7) "It appears that leaders generally want to have a relationship with their followers for various reasons, how does it all begin specifically for you as a leader?", (8) "How does your overall concept of a leader-follower relationship influence employee performance in your organization?", (9) "How do you engage followers in the influence process?", (10) "How do you demonstrate trust in your followers?", and (11) "Is there anything else you would be interested in adding concerning leader-follower relationships and individual performance that could be pertinent to this study?"

Follower participants were also asked to respond to twelve questions concerning their perceptions of leader-follower relationships including: (1) "What is your overall concept of what the relationship between a leader and his/her follower should be like?", (2) "What specific characteristics do you look for in a leader?", (3) "How important is it for you to have a relationship with your leader?", (4) "In what way(s) does your relationship with your leader impact your performance?", (5) "How does your leader contribute to the creation of your performance?", (6) "During the time you have been employed in this company, what has the experience of getting to know your leader been like?", (7) "What specific steps (if any) do you take or have you taken to develop a relationship with your leader?", (8) "It appears that people generally want to have good relationships with their leaders, how does it all begin for you?", (9) "In your own words, how can an employee build a relationship with his/her leader?", (10) "How does your overall concept of a leader-follower relationship influence employee performance in your organization?", (11) "How do you demonstrate trust in your leader?", and (12) "Is there anything else you

would be interested in adding concerning leader-follower relationships and individual performance that could be pertinent to this study?”

Procedure

Upon obtaining approval from the IRB, solicitation to participate which described the research study, process, and expectations associated with participation in the study was sent by company e-mail to managers and employees of the participating organization. Obtaining assurance of each participant's qualification to participate in the study required a formal process of control (Creswell, 2003). The selection comprised of a request for voluntary participation and written acknowledgment of the participation's terms and conditions. One government agency from a Caribbean island was selected for participation. Upon receiving a sufficient amount of responses for participation, participants were approached to set up an appointment for one-on-one, face-to-face interview.

Interviews were conducted in a private setting at the facility where the research population was employed. At the start of the interview session, an informed consent form was reviewed with each participant to confirm the purpose of the study, attain a signed agreement to participate in the study, and to provide consent for the interview to be audio-recorded. Once consent was obtained, the audio-recording began and interview questions were administered.

Data Validity and Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the recorded interview responses were reviewed and transcribed verbatim for each participant. Creswell (2005) asserted that participant check is an essential technique for researchers using a qualitative method to verify the accuracy of their findings. Each participant was asked to examine the interview's transcribed version. They authenticated the interpretation and confirmed that the transcribed information was a valid representation of what was said and recorded during the interview.

After the transcriptions were validated, the responses were uploaded into ATLAS.ti®, a well-liked qualitative software data analysis tool, to assist with data analysis and for coding and creating code families. ATLAS.ti was also used to help find correlations, similarities, unity, analogies, or homologies contained by the varied sets of data and helped in uncovering patterns. It was also suitable for making connections between various elements of the data and effective for making well-defined connections between the data elements (Barry, 1998). Moustakas' (1994) proposition for data analysis and coding steps was employed to analyze the data: (a) reviewed the complete information to find a generalization in relation to the data, (b) utilized horizontalization to discover important statements that present a perception of the research participants' experience with the phenomenon, (c) arranged those important statements into clusters of meanings or themes, and (d) developed an inclusive explanation or report of the real meaning of the experience for each individual and combined relationship for the group.

RESULTS

The findings of this study were based on responses to each interview question from leaders and followers where each response was coded to identify emerging themes. Data coding recognized indicators and signals in the various nodes. This allowed for logical and pragmatic coding of the finalized analysis. The coding process entailed analyzing the data from the leader-participants interview transcriptions and the follower-participants interview transcriptions about what code would be most appropriate or suitable for the specific response to each interview question. Transcription and analysis of the data allowed for the assessment of word use and the number of times or consistency of their occurrence. Keywords from participant (leaders and followers) responses were: (a) supportive, (b) partnership, (c) creative, (d) work together, (e) respect, (f) trust, (g) colleague, (h) example, (i) motivate, (j) initiative, (k) important, (l) do work, (m) communicate, (n) understand, (o) contact, (p) good rapport, (q) engage, (r) professional, (s) observe, and (t) relate. The method of phenomenological data reduction and horizontalization generated three emerging themes during the interpretive process of data analysis. The three themes that emerged

were mapped back to the research questions (Creswell, 2007). Emerging themes comprise collaborative relationship, partnership relationship, and engaged relationship.

Employees who participated in the study considered collaboration between the leader and the follower as a requisite and significant element of the leader-follower relationship and individual performance. The participants accentuated the significance of leaders and their followers working collaboratively to realize and attain organizational success and enhance individual performance levels. They described the leader-follower relationship as a collaborative relationship where (i) the leader sets the tone for the organization by functioning as an example for his/her followers to follow, (ii) leaders and followers work together towards a common goal through good and skillful communication strategies, (iii) mutual trust, respect for each other, and honesty steer the relationship so that each individual visualizes himself or herself as part of the group and an invaluable asset to the organization, and (iv) individuals are given the opportunity to express themselves, share their ideas, and feel comfortable to speak about issues. As part of the collaborative relationship, these participants insinuated that leaders as well as followers must actively seek out and take initiatives that provide opportunities to develop quality LMX relationships that lead to organizational success.

The participants also identified the leader-follower relationship as a partnership. The quality of this relationship was categorized as synergetic, that is, the leader (s) and follower(s) partnering together in a creative and innovative manner to produce results that are individualistically unattainable. The participants believed that one individual is not sufficient enough to drive organizational success. They shared the idea that two is better than one and that by working together they are able to accomplish more and sometimes more within a lesser time period. The leaders, for example, would rather approach or treat their followers as colleagues within the organization who have specific portfolios to fulfill. The participants considered themselves to be a fulfillment of another's portfolio and that each must work together to see the organizational assignments accomplished. This partnership relationship comprise of independence or impartiality and mutual trust. Independence implied making a contribution to the importance and implication of partnership in the leader-follower relationship. Trust was presented as being critical for maintaining confidentiality, treating each other with respect, and a motivational element for the relationship.

Engagement emerged as the kind of relation that leaders and followers must embrace in order to participate in the kind of quality LMX relationship required to enhance individual performance, achieve organizational goals, and establish more reliable and effective leader-follower roles. The participants, therefore, described the relationship as an engaged relationship implying that it is critical for leaders and followers to be consistently engaged with each other to help the relationship evolve into a dynamic relationship.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover what the leader-follower relationship experience represented to each individual participant who already had the experience, and how the participants defined the phenomena. The research purpose answered the study's three research questions. The results of the data collected from the interviews discovered three fundamental themes constructed from explicit meanings obtained from the responses of the leader and follower participants. Meaningful expressions were revealed that exposed individual experiences resulting in the discovery of the study's core themes. The three themes emerged from the study include: (a) collaborative relationship, (b) partnership relationship, and (c) engaged relationship.

The findings of the study suggested: (a) leaders and followers value availability of being able to work together to attain organizational goals and objectives, (b) leaders and followers believed that a partnership relationship is essential to their ability to perform effectively in the organization, and (c) the leader-follower relationship was built on an engaged relationship where leaders and followers were consistently engaged with each other through on-going communication channels.

Findings were consistent with existing literature concerning various leadership theories, communication, and the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Prevailing concepts of the LMX theory were confirmed in the results of the study. The significance of the leader-follower relationship from the seminal exploration presented by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975), Cashman and Graen (1975), and Graen (1976) was valuable to discovering what constitutes the leader-follower relationship in an organization, how the exchange relationship influences individual performance, and how exchange relationships between leaders and followers evolve and develop over time. The findings implied that the leader-follower relationship comprise a collaborative relationship that is supported by a partnership relationship which evolves and develops by means of an engaged relationship resulting in quality leader-follower relationship and high level performing individuals. Each of the themes, collaborative relationship, partnership relationship, and engaged relationship, presented a clearer perception of the phenomenon and is discussed below relative to the research findings.

Collaborative Relationship

Collaborative relationship emerged as an important contributor to the leader-follower relationship and individual performance. When leaders and followers work together (collaboratively), it is possible for the organization to be successful and enhance individual performance. The leaders and followers in this study expressed that leaders and followers alike have a unique role to play in fostering the collaborative relationship. Participants valued their experience of working together to achieve the organizational goal. They expressed dissatisfaction when there was a gap in the williness of members to work together. Participants believed that any individual who chooses to work without complete collaboration with the other members of the organization could create unnecessary tension in the workplace. The leaders and followers have confidence that if collaboration is pivotal in the leader-follower relationship, the possibility of a win-win setting is attainable.

The leaders and followers described the leader-follower relationship as a collaborative relationship which is supported by good communication skills among the members, and the leaders' expertise to manage, guide, inspire, give direction, and set the example in the organization. A mutual and communally concurred framework amongst leaders and followers in the organization emerges from what LMX theory identifies as the second stage of the exchange relationship where agreements are perfected, and mutual trust, respect, and loyalty are cultivated (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991; Yukl, 2006). Ultimately, collaboration constitutes the leader-follower relationship in organization.

Partnership Relationship

LMX theory encourages fairness to all employees and the opportunity to allow each employee to become as participating in the organization's work as much as they intend to be participative (Northouse, 2007). This level of participation requires leaders and followers to exercise respect and trust for each other, knowing that individuals are unique in what they bring to the table and focus their attention on learning to relate to each other. The leaders and followers who participated of this study believed that as members of the organization, it is imperative for them to partner together to accomplish the organization's objectives.

The results of my finding affirmed that the research participants perceived their leader-follower relationship as a partnership. The leaders and followers of the organization were zealous and enthusiastic to contribute to the entire group and add value to the organization. Even though the participants, both leader and follower, recognized the hierarchical setting of the leader-follower relationship, they voiced the value of partnering together to get the job done. By the leaders and followers being in a partnership with each other, it allowed them the independence to accomplish their work assignments. Employees appreciated the independence and flexibility to decide the most appropriate way for performing their tasks and recognized their independence as an opportunity for them to explicitly apply their skills and potentials. Independence, they considered, was an indication that they were able to effectively solve problems individually.

Additionally, the employees believed that a partnership relationship was crucial to their ability to perform effectively. They categorized the relationship as being synergetic, affirming that it was better and easier for them to work together in a more creative and innovative manner. They shared the idea that two was better than one and that the ability to perform effectively was dependent on working with each other. In fact, they emphasized that good relationships result in good performance or high output while poor relationships result in poor performance or low output. The leaders and followers affirmed that they needed each other to become effective in their role or portfolio. The followers indicated that they looked forward to their opinions and suggestions to be inquired about, and felt appreciated when their leader included their opinions or suggestions in the decision-making process. The leaders, on the other hand, acknowledged that their followers had valuable information that they could continually utilize when making organizational decisions. Together, they (leaders and followers) believed that they had what was necessary amongst themselves to obtain strong leader-follower relationship and influence their ability to perform at a high level. My findings for this study proposed that the leader-follower relationship plays a significant role in individual performance.

Engaged Relationship

Northouse (2007) five key strengths of LMX theory included: a) strong explanatory theory, b) unique theory because of its focus on the dyadic relationship as the focal point of the leadership process, c) emphasizes communication in leadership, d) reminds leaders to be equal and impartial with their followers, and e) connects with positive organizational results such as performance (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991). According to Graen and Cashman (1975), the exchange relationships between leaders and followers are rooted in personal compatibility and the follower's competency and dependability. LMX theory also notes the need to be cognizant and sensitive about relating to followers (Northouse). Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) proposed that leaders should strive to form distinct exchange relationship with all their followers instead of a selected few. The leaders and followers of this study adhere to this concept affirming the leader-follower relationship as an engaged relationship.

The employees believed that an engaged relationship was critical for the organization. They suggested that while it was important to establish the leader-follower relationship from their initial interaction, they needed to continue being involved with each regularly so that the relationship can mature progressively. The leaders and followers described the engaged relationship as an opportunity for them to share information on a regular basis, have on-going channels of communication, each individual taking the initiative to discuss issues, and commitment to professional and social obligations. They maintained that good communication skills were the key component for the relationship and that each individual should be aware of how they communicate with each other. They believed in the idea that communication can make or break the relationship. Therefore, they felt that to be engaged with each other, they would have to learn and get to know each other and make a conscious decision to treat each other with respect. The leaders and followers of this study further indicated that there were key motivators that contributed to the engaged relationships which entailed the kind of quality leader-follower relationship they desired, well-defined expectations, untarnished and clear-cut communication, willingness to contribute to the group, opportunities for professional and personal advancement, and availability of needed resources for effectiveness (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Maylett & Riboldi, 2008). They believed that it is out of this engaged relationship or continued interaction that the leader-follower relationship evolves into a well-nurtured and mature relationship.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS TO LMX THEORY

A major thrust behind the key concerns in LMX theory has been the meaningful and important relationships discovered between performance-related outcomes and LMX. Study conducted by Wakabayashi & Graen (1989) on Japanese firms posited that establishing high-quality exchanges in the initial stages of joining an organization was an effective promotion and successive career success predictor. Higgins, Judge, and Ferris (2003) affirmed that some followers take the initiative to develop

favorable relationships instead of submissively accepting anything their leader choose to do. Gerstner and Day's (1997), meta-analytical study which focused mostly on the relationships between LMX indications and the number of outcome variables, discovered a deeper connection between LMX and subjective factors than between LMX and objective factors. Their conclusions were further affirmed by a study conducted by Liden, Sparrowe and Wayne (1997). Moreover, research in LMX theory has also discovered that leaders, trained to develop high-quality relationships with their followers, experienced continual achievements in the actual performance of their followers (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Scandura & Graen, 1984). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) integrated the results of the studies outcomes and incorporated the recommendation that leaders should attempt to establish and develop individual relationships with all followers; not just with a preferred few. Research in LMX theory, however, has revealed that the relationship between leaders and their followers are imperative for both organizational and individual outcomes. These outcomes include job satisfaction (Schriesheim et al., 1998), organizational commitment (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994), citizen behaviors (Wayne et al., 1997; Deluga, 1994), staff turnover (Ferris, 1985), job satisfaction (Wayne, Linden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999), and goal commitment (Klein & Kim, 1998).

The findings of the study confirmed the previous findings for LMX theory. The leaders and followers who participated in the study affirmed the ideas that positive leader-follower relationships are co-related with positive individual performance. They further believed that as they cultivate on-going relationships among themselves, they will be able to achieve the organizational goals and objectives. The employees affirmed other LMX theory findings that leaders and followers should develop strong dyadic relationships in an organization. My findings for this confirmed the findings for LMX theory that positive organizational outcomes such as, improved individual performance, are related to high-quality dyadic relationships.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study comprised employing a qualitative method, a phenomenological research design, the number of research participants from the organization, and the data collection and analysis process. The limitations of the study could have influenced the results because of the process used for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data. The qualitative methodology comprises probable influence of my biases and skills.

Qualitative research methodology depends on examination of relational exchanges that resulted in the probability of the presentation of unexpected variables affecting the extent and quality of information obtained from the research participants. I interpreted the data by utilizing proven methods that foster objectivity. The reliability and validity of the emerging themes were limited to both cultural and contextual dynamics of the research sample as well as the expanse to which the research instruments retained objectivity. In qualitative research, the researcher is integrated as an instrument for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. This limitation may have possibly inspired the study's results even if sufficient cautionary measures were adopted to exclude probable bias and skill.

Phenomenological research design is one which attempts to investigate the lived experiences, perspectives, and understandings of participants (Simon & Francis, 2006). The study is limited by employing phenomenology because the research design was utilized to study perceptive structures that define and understand experiences without direct concern for assumptions (Simon & Francis). Even if a phenomenological research design was suitable for the study, employing this research design could have influenced the results of the study. The use of an alternate research approach could have uncovered different themes.

The study may have been limited by the choice of single organization in one Caribbean island. If this study had incorporated multiple organizations within the public sector or incorporated organizations within the private sector, the study would probably achieve different results.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined the leader-follower relationship and how the relationship influence individual performance in an organization in an island of the Caribbean. The results of the study revealed that a phenomenon exists concerning the leader-follower relationship and the influence of the relationship on individual performance. Future research should consider added study that enhances organizational knowledge about various elements that enable and advance the leader-follower relationship and its influence on individual performance.

This study examined the experiences of leaders and followers in a single public sector organization in a Caribbean island. Further understanding is needed concerning factors that contribute to the leader-follower relationship in other organizations in the Caribbean such as, other public sector organizations and private sectors industries like finance and healthcare. Moreover, future research could also comprise a replication of this study in other Caribbean islands within the same sector or other public or private sectors. Research of that magnitude may possibly offer more knowledge about elements that constitute the leader-follower relationship and the influence of the relationship on individual performance.

This research has been limited to the lived experiences of the 23 individuals comprising 7 leaders and 16 followers who volunteered to participate in the study. The 23 participants comprised of men and women. Replicating this study to the following could possibly expand the findings' generalizability: a larger sample size that incorporates men and women, and a population comprising of either men or women only.

Finally, future studies could employ different qualitative approaches, for instance, grounded theory or case study, to obtain more knowledge of the leader-follower relationship and the influence of the relationship on individual performance in an organization or organizations in the Caribbean. A quantitative research methodology could also be utilized to provide empirical discovery of the leader-follower relationship and the influence of the relationship on individual performance in an organization or organizations in the Caribbean. By replicating this study by using other qualitative approaches or quantitative method may enhance the leadership studies by discovering new themes and/or authenticating the finding of this study.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the lived experiences of 23 research participants comprising 7 leaders and 16 followers employed in an organization in an island of the Caribbean has disclosed significant data about what constitutes the leader-follower relationship and the influence of the relationship on individual performance in an organization. On the whole, the themes which emerged from the study were coherent with research conducted on LMX relationships that identify elements of the leader-follower relationship and individual performance or positive organizational outcomes. The three themes emerged from the study were identified as collaborative relationship, partnership relationship, and engaged relationship. Put together, these themes indicated that the leader-follower relationship is progressive in nature which begins through collaboration amongst the leader and the follower, continues in partnership between the leader and the follower through synergy, and evolves or develops through engagements between the leader and the follower. These themes, however, inspired proposals for further research concerning leader-follower relationship and individual performance. Furthermore, they contributed to the body of knowledge concerning leader-follower relationships and the influence of the relationship on individual performance.

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