Leader-member Exchange and Transformational Leadership Style: A Prediction to Thriving at Work

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author OJAC designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and managed the literature searches. Author EIS wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author INC managed the field work (data collection). All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

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ABSTRACT

The world's economic and organizational growth is increasingly becoming difficult as a result of harsh leadership styles and highhandedness in imprinting certain policies and rules into the organization. Going by this trend, this study explored leader-member exchange and transformational leadership style: a prediction to thriving at work among employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra, Nigeria. The sample population of the study comprised of 102 non-teaching staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra, Nigeria. Thirty-two (32) males and sixty-eight (68) females with age range of 23 to 56 years with a mean age of 32.5 who were selected through simple random sampling. Instruments used for data collection were leader-member exchange scale, transformational leadership inventory and thriving scale. In the method section, predictive design was adopted and hierarchical regression statistics was used to analyze the predictive strength of the variables. Three hypotheses guided the study and the results indicated that leader member exchange and transformational leadership style independently predicted thriving at work at B=.80 and .34, p<.05 respectively. Also, leader member exchange and transformational leadership style jointly predicted thriving at work at B= .62 and B=.34, p <.05 respectively. The findings from this study imply that leader member exchange and transformational leadership style can greatly impact thriving at work and this would in turn lead to greater work

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commitment and organizational effectiveness among public sector employees. It was recommended that organizations put to use transformational leadership styles and as well grant leaders the opportunity to share ideas and opinions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly unstable economic environment, sustainability of high performance is crucial. Regrettably, only few individuals have the push, the psychology or the mindset, the training and the ability to sustain high performance on a daily basis and on a long magnitude [1]. [2] in their study showed that an important mechanism for understanding the human dimension of sustainability is thriving at work. Their study opined that thriving employees demonstrates 16% better performance and are 25% less prone to burnout than their peers, while 32% of thriving employees reported job satisfaction. Furthermore, thriving at work is perceived as a buffer to negative psychological outcomes, such as burnout and it is critical for sustaining performance, health and well-being [2]. Thus, it is crucial to understand whether thriving at work will be anchored on the predictions of leader-member exchange and transformational leadership style.

Thriving is said to occur when workers have the energy to recognize, investigate, and solve problems and to ultimately implement improvements to work processes thus increasing their cognitive resources [3]. Additionally, thriving is not only keeping the psychological state, in which we are, but also growing and feeling the progress [4]. [5] and [6] defined thriving at work as the experience by which sense of learning and sense of vitality is felt simultaneously. In a nutshell, sense of learning refers to being better at tasks at work while vitality refers to being energized, willing and alive at work. Vitality has been known as an affective experience [7] and encircles excitement, enthusiasm, vigor and doing things whole-heartedly. It is also seen as living life as an adventure [8]. Psychologically, vitality brings meaning and purpose for one's own actions [9]. However, jitter, fury or anger which is negative affectivity is not in parallel with subjective vitality [7]. According to [10] Circumflex Model of Affect, vitality is stated as a positive affect and high arousal. If one of these dimensions (learning and vitality) is not experienced, thriving is not said to have occurred. Also, [2] pointed out that when employees continue learning with a depleted energy, it will most likely lead to burnout instead of thriving. In a similar vein, a working employee who is full of sense of vitality cannot be experiencing thriving at work if the learning component is missing [5]. The reason is because these dimensions of thriving (learning and vitality) comprehend both cognitive and affective dimensions of personal growth.

Leader-member exchange is a relationship-based approach to leadership that focuses on the two-way (dyadic) relationship between leaders and followers [11]. Ideally, much of the works performed in today's business environments can be described as team-oriented, with most organizations requiring their members to operate with their teams to facilitate strategic objectives [12]. Given their increased prevalence, the effectiveness of work teams has become a focal interest for human resources initiatives in the workplace. Team performance outcomes such as quality of team decisions, may be enhanced when members believe they work in positive team atmospheres, characterized by respect and interpersonal harmony [13]. In contrast, lack of effective communication and interconnectivity, have been cited as key culprits of team failure [14]. Given the importance of interconnectivity and coherence among team members combined with the body of research supporting effects of leadership behavior on employee and group behaviors [15], many researchers have argued for a much deeper understanding of the relationship between leader-team interactions and team effectiveness [16]. According to several researches team's communication, coordination and cohesion habits are very vital for facilitating task works and team works. This is in line with the view of [17] which suggests that greater quality of social exchange occurring between leaders and individual team members is associated with greater quality of social exchange among team mates. There is need for organizations to create positive changes and allow for exchange of ideas in order to boost and motivate the followers to do more.

According to [18], a transformational leader is a person who stimulates, inspires and transforms followers to achieve extra ordinary outcomes. He or she pays attention to the developmental needs of individual followers' awareness of issues by helping them look at old problems in new and idealized ways. Transformational leadership theory/style is all about leadership that creates positive changes in the followers whereby they take care of each other's interest and acts in the interest of the group [19]. It enhances the motivation, the morale and the performance of followers' sense of identity and self to the project and the collective identity of the organization; being a role model for followers that inspires them and makes them interested; challenging followers to take ownership of their works and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of followers, so the ladder can align followers with tasks that enhance their performance.

Warrilow S. [19], identified four components of transformational leadership style:

1. **Charisma or idealized influence:** The degree to which the leader behaves in admirable ways and take stands that pushes to identify with the leader who has a clear set of values and acts as role models for the followers.

2. **Inspirational Motivation:** The degree to which a leader articulates a vision that is appealing to and inspires the followers with optimism about future goals and offers meaning for the current task at hand.

3. **Intellectual stimulation:** The degree, to which the leader challenges assumptions, stimulates and encourages creativity in the followers-by providing a framework for followers to see how they connect to the leader, in which they can creatively overcome obstacles in the way of the mission.

4. **Personal and individual attention:** The degree to which the leader attends to each individual followers' needs and acts as a mentor or coach and gives respect and appreciation of the individual's contribution to the team. This fulfills and enhances each individual team members' need for self fulfillment and self worth and in so doing, inspires followers to further achievements and growths.

In the face of the above discussion, this research found it imperative in seeking to know if thriving at work are the basic predictions of transformational leadership style and leader-member exchange.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.1 Path goal theory of leadership [20]

Path–goal theory is about how leaders motivate followers to accomplish designated goals. Drawing heavily from research on what motivates followers, path–goal theory first appeared in the leadership literature in the early 1970 s in the works of [21,22,23] and [20]. The stated goal of this leadership theory is to enhance follower performance and follower satisfaction by focusing on follower motivation. In contrast to the situational approach, which suggests that a leader must adapt to the development level of followers, path–goal theory emphasizes the relationship between the leader's style and the characteristics of the followers and the organizational setting. For the leader, the imperative is to use a leadership style that best meets followers' motivational needs. This is done by choosing behaviors that complement or supplement what is missing in the work setting. Leaders try to enhance followers' goal attainment by providing information or rewards in the work environment [24]; leaders provide followers with the elements they think followers need to reach their goals. According to [20], leadership generates motivation when it increases the number and kinds of payoffs that followers receive from their work. Leadership also motivates when it makes the path to the goal clear and easy to travel through coaching and direction, removing obstacles and roadblocks to attaining the goal, and making the work itself more individualistically fulfilling. Within path-goal theory, motivation is conceptualized from the perspective of the expectancy theory of motivation [25]. The underlying assumption of expectancy theory is that followers will be motivated if they think or feel they are capable of performing their work, if they trust their efforts will result in a certain outcome, and if they conceive that the payoffs for doing their work are worthwhile. The challenge for a leader using ideas from expectancy theory is to understand completely the aims of each follower and the benefits associated with the aims. Followers want to feel efficacious, like they can accomplish what they set out to do. But, they also want to know that they will be rewarded if they can

accomplish their work. A leader needs to find out what is rewarding to followers about their work and then make those rewards available to them when they accomplish the requirements of their work. Expectancy theory is about the goals that followers choose and how leaders help them and reward them for meeting those goals.

This theory is important in explaining some of the conditions under which employees thrive at the workplace. Employees tend to thrive when they work with leaders who give them motivation and encouragement on how they can improve on their work lives.

In view of the contributions of the review and observed gaps, the following hypotheses guided the study:

1. Will leader member exchange predict thriving at work among workers?

2. Will transformational leadership style predict thriving at work among workers?

3. Will leader member exchange and transformational leadership style jointly predict thriving at work among workers?

2. METHODS

The design of this study was predictive design; hierarchical regression was used to test the hypotheses that guided the study. One hundred and two (102) non-academic staff of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra-Nigeria served as participants of the study. They include 32 males and 68 females whose ages range from 23-56 years, with a mean age of 32.5. They were selected through simple random sampling. The study adopted three scales for measuring the variables. The scales include; Thriving at Work Scale, Leader-Member Exchange Scale and Transformational Leadership Inventory.

Thriving at work was measured using a 10-item Thriving Scale developed by [6]. It is one of the most commonly used scales used in assessing thriving at work and measures two dimensions: vitality and learning. It is a seven (7) point Likert-type scale with higher scores indicating higher levels of thriving. Some of the items in the scale include " I continue to learn more as time goes by", I have developed a lot as a person", "I have energy and spirit". A Cronbach alpha of .90 was generated from the pilot study. The participants of the pilot study were drawn from Parklane Hospital, Trans-Ekulu, Enugu State.

Leader Member Exchange was measured using an 11-item LMX scale developed by [11]. The instrument assessed the quality of supervisors-subordinate relationship from the perspective of the subordinate. It is one of the most commonly used scales used in assessing the quality of LMX, and measures three dimensions; trust, respect and obligation. It is a five (5) point Likert-type response. Some of the items in the scale include "I like my supervisor very much as a person", My supervisor is a lot of fun to work with", I admire my supervisor's professional skills". [11] reported a Cronbach alpha of .95, indicating that the scale has high internal consistency. However, a Cronbach alpha of .88 score was generated from the pilot study.

Transformational Leadership Style was measured using Transformational Leadership Inventory developed by [26]. The TLI consists of 23-items with six (6) dimensions: Articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering the acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations, individualized support and intellectual stimulation. Some of the items in the scale include: "My supervisor has a clear understanding of where we are heading to, my supervisor leads by doing rather than by saying, my supervisor provides a good model for me to follow". The author utilized seven (7) Point Likert-type responses and reported Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient ranging from .80 to .90, for the dimensions. [27] reported TLI Cronbach alpha of .83 in his pilot study.

3. RESULTS

The result in Table 1 indicates that the adjusted R^2 for leader-member exchange was .651 with R^2 change indicating a 65.3% contribution of leader-member exchange to the overall prediction of thriving at work in the model. When transformational leadership was added to the model, the adjusted R^2 increased to .733 indicating that transformational leadership had an independent contribution of 8.3% to the model.

The regression model as indicated in Table 2 confirmed that the observed independent contributions of the leader-member exchange and transformational leadership on thriving at work were significant and was confirmed at B = .80, p < .05 and B = .34, p < .05 respectively. Also, the result showed that the joint predictive effects of leader-member exchange and transformational leadership was confirmed as model 2 at B = .62, and .34, p < .05 respectively.

Table 1. Model summary which shows independent contribution of transformational leadership and leader member exchange on thriving at work

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Est.	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.808[a]	.653	.651	6.41774	.653	376.234	1	200	.000
2	.858[b]	.736	.733	5.61453	.083	62.317	1	199	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Leader-member-exchange
b. Predictors: (Constant), Leader-member-exchange, Transformational Leadership

Table 2. Beta coefficients for the predictive effects of transformational leadership and leader member exchange on thriving at work

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-18.665	1.999		-9.337	.000
	Leader-member-exchange	2.728	.141	.808	19.397	.000
2	(Constant)	-32.243	2.453		-13.144	.000
	Leader-member-exchange	2.093	.147	.620	14.239	.000
	Transformational Leadership	.685	.087	.344	7.894	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Thriving at work

Thus, the result confirmed that leader-member exchange and transformational leadership significantly predicted thriving at work while the model for joint predictive effects of leader-member exchange and transformational leadership was alsoconfirmed. Consequently, hypothesis 1-3 were confirmed.

4. DISCUSSION

From the statistical findings in the result table, leader member exchange and transformational leadership style significantly predicted thriving at work among employees of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra, Nigeria. The prediction is indicative that leader member exchange and transformational leadership style are positive organizational outcomes which trigger thriving at work among employees thus, managers and leaders of organizations are advised to always support their subordinates' views and opinions.

This study is supported by the findings of [28] where they found leader-member exchange positively relating with individual energy. Their study maintained that a great deal of careful effort is required by the leadership to motivate employees so they could perform at optimal level on time. This desire may come true only when subordinates intrinsically have energy to produce better results in accordance with management and organizational needs. Based on the fact above, this study strongly advises that organizations do employ transformational leadership style and as well allow members to share ideas and opinions with their leaders. This will give them ample opportunity to thrive in their work.

Similarly, [29] tested for the relationship between predictor leader member exchange and mediator perceived organizational support. The data showed that that Leader-member exchange significantly relates to perceived organizational support.

5. CONCLUSION

Prior to this study, there have been increase in the call and need for organizations to enhance the level of leader-member exchange of ideas and opinions as these are the driving forces that promotes the workings of almost all organizations. However, organizations that employ authoritarian kind of leadership are bound to frustrate their workers, with a very high level of intention to quit among such workers. Consequently, the current study is a germane effort to advance the knowledge on leader member exchange, transformational leadership

style and how they jointly predicted thriving at work.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the positive and significant predictions, the following recommendations are worth pointing out:

1. There is need for organizations to employ transformational leadership style and allow for leaders to share ideas and opinions with their members. This enables them to thrive in their work. This assertion is supported by the current study.

2. When there is a decrease in organizational effectiveness and efficiency, management needs to go back to the drawing board and review their leadership style.

3. Future research should employ different approach and study different participants, to see if the same or different linear model result will be found. This will give a better generalizability.

7. IMPLICATIONS

Organizations with increased participation of workers and managers sharing opinions, ideas and views have been severally reported to have received moral boosters and courage to work harder among their workers. This implies that when workers are denied moral obligations to contribute on how the affairs of the organizations are been ran, it discourages, frustrates and may even lead to eventual death of such organizations. These conditions are capable of reducing organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Hence are not encouraged or advocated.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard guideline participant consent and ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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