

Uncovering the impact of triadic relationships within a team on job performance: An application of balance theory in predicting feedback-seeking behavior

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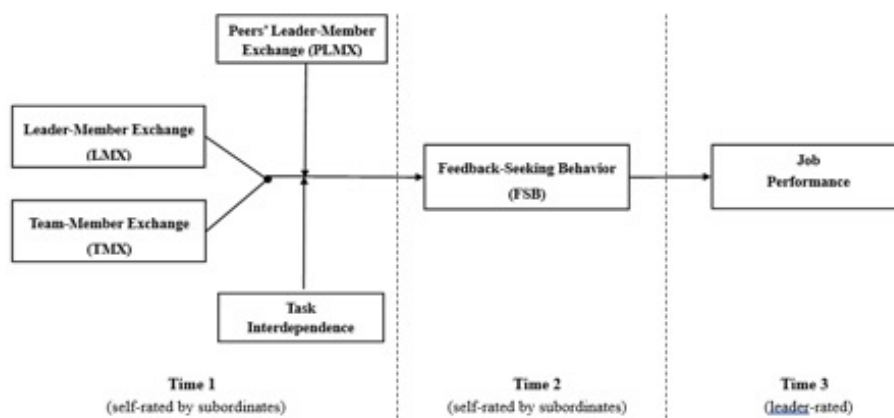
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Although a great deal of knowledge has accumulated about dyadic relationships (i.e., leader-member exchange (LMX) or team-member exchange (TMX)) within a team, employee behaviors that involve triadic relationships among focal employees, leaders, and teammates have seldom been investigated. Using Balance Theory, which describes triadic relationships from a power-dependence perspective, in the current study, we explore how the interplay of LMX, TMX, and peers' LMX jointly impact employees' feedback-seeking behavior (FSB) and subsequent job performance.

By conducting a multilevel moderated polynomial regression on three-wave, multi-source data from 147 team members and their leaders (from 45 work teams), we found that the incongruence between LMX and TMX facilitates FSB when peers' LMX or task interdependence is high. We also found an asymmetrical incongruence effect concerning the way in which individuals are more likely to seek feedback when LMX is worse than TMX, compared with when LMX is better than TMX. This differential effect is stronger when peers' LMX or task interdependence is high. The interplay of LMX, TMX, peers' LMX, and task interdependence eventually has an indirect effect on job performance through FSB. The results from a follow-up study of 270 employees from 77 teams further confirm our predictions about the mechanism of Balance Theory. Specifically, the results indicate that when peers' LMX is high, the incongruence between LMX and TMX decreases employees' psychological safety.

The most unique aspect of our study is the utilization of Balance Theory to explain the effects of triadic relationships on employees' proactive behaviors, such as FSB, and on subsequent job performance. Prior research that has involved relationships among all three parties (i.e., the focal employee, leader, and teammates) has focused either on the combined and parallel effects of LMX and TMX (e.g., Liao et al., 2010) or on the triad of one supervisor and two coworkers (e.g., Tse et al., 2013). These studies fall short of including all other teammates when studying the potential influence of triadic relationships within a team. Moreover, in this article, we include a follow-up study to test the psychological mechanism of Balance Theory and find that employees under an imbalanced triad demonstrate low levels of psychological safety, as assumed by the theory. We believe that our study will open up an important direction for future organizational behavior studies that involve triadic relationships.



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