Does Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Quality Always Yield Positive Outcomes for Organizations?

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Does Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Quality Always Yield Positive Outcomes for Organizations? LMX as the Moderating Variable of the Formation of Counter-productive Work Behavior's Ripple Effect

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Abstract: Studies toward Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) show that quality LMX tends to produce positive results for organizations. This article argues that LMX quality could also have a negative influence on an organization when the leader of the organization or a unit within the organization has negative perceptions and negative behaviors toward the organization. Thus Counter-Productive Work Behavior (CWB) displayed by the leader will negatively affect subordinates' work behavior, which is moderated by the LMX quality. This is an inverse effect as the stronger quality LMX will have an increased negative impact effecting increased CWB among the subordinates of a leader who has high quality LMX and displays negative perceptions and negative behaviors toward the organization (CWB) in his or her workplace activities. This negative impact amplifies due to the ripple effect in organizations that have several levels of management.

Keywords: Counter-productive Work Behavior, Leader-Member Exchange, Ripple Effect.

I. Introduction

The effectiveness of leadership is one of the factors that should increase organizational effectiveness through the role a leader has in affecting subordinates' work behavior. In this case, we will examine the work behavior displayed by employees attempting to meet organizational expectations. The authors have found that the importance of leadership roles in organizations has received a great deal of attention from scholars of organizational behavior. This attention is shown from the numerous studies that focus on and examine leadership. Based on his review of the theories and studies of leadership, Yukl (1989b) classified research into leadership into three groups: (1) leadership viewed from the power-influence; (2) leadership viewed from leader behavior; (3) leadership viewed from leader traits or situational factors that are interacting with behaviors, traits, or power.

Effective leader from the power influence approach is how leaders use their powers. Leadership viewed from leader behavior is how the leader behavior influences the effectiveness of leadership. Leadership viewed from leader traits or situational factors says that physical attributes of a leader or contextual factors will influence the leadership effectiveness (Yukl 1989b). The leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is across all three categories because this theory explains how leaders use their position power to develop different exchange relationships with different subordinates, and leaders usually establish a special relationship with a small number of trusted subordinates (Yukl 1989a). LMX is one of the leadership theories that has gained a considerable amount of interest from researchers. This theory has stimulated many empirical studies (e.g., Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell 1993; Graen, Novak, and Sommerkamp 1982; Duchon, Green, and Taber 1986; Nystrom 1990; Synder and Bruning 1985; Kim and Organ 1982; Graen, Liden, and Hoel 1982; Vecchio 1985; Erdogan, Liden, and Kraimer 2006; Wayne, Shore, and Liden 1997; Janssen and Yperen 2004; Wang et al. 2005; Gajendran and Joshi 2012;

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Liao, Liu, and Raymond 2010; Vianen, Shen, and Chuang 2011; Eisenberger, et al. 2010); meta-analyses (e.g., Gerstner and Day 1997); and even articles that critisized and proposed development of LMX theory (e.g., Dienesch and Liden 1986; Bauer and Green 1996). Almost all the previous studies on LMX empirically have supported that the quality of leader-member relationships (LMX quality) will generate positive outcomes for organizations.

Meta-analyses of LMX have shown that positive outcomes related to LMX could be classified into seven classes: (1) higher performance ratings; (2) better objective performance; (3) higher overall satisfaction; (4) greater satisfaction with a supervisor; (5) stronger organizational commitment; (6) more positive role perception; and (7) support for other relationship such as member competence and turnover (Gerstner and Day 1997). Other studies have shown that LMX has a positive relationship with climate perception and justice (Erdogan, Liden, and Kraimer 2006; Graen et al. 1973), organizational citizenship behaviors (Manogran and Conlon 1973), decision influence (Scandura, Graen, and Novak 1986), leader effectiveness (Deluga and Perry 1991), member empowerment (Keller and Dansereau 1995; Wang et al. 2005), creativity and innovation (Liao, Liu, and Raymond 2010; Gajendran and Joshi 2012), and person-environmental fit (Vianen, Shen, and Chuang 2011).

Previous research into LMX has suggested that every problem or negative impact from behavioral issues in an organization could be solved by the LMX theory. Furthermore, researchers tend to give suggestions to practitioners about how to enhance the quality of leader-member relationships. While both researchers and practitioners have high positive expectations of the LMX theory, the majority of research into LMX has failed to take certain situations or conditions into account, including the possibility of negative influence from LMX on organizations. Studies have demonstrated positive relationships between LMX and positive work-related behaviors, which then lead to organizational effectiveness. These studies have assumed that the leaders had positive perceptions and attitudes toward the organizations. However, when a leader in an organization (either the leader at the teamwork level or at a higher level) has a negative perception and attitude toward the organization (possibly caused by the experience of injustice), high LMX may make the organization suffer since the negative perception and attitude of the leader has influence. Such leaders may indoctrinate team members (subordinates) with information that the leader believes as the truth. Thus, information received by his team members about the organization may contain negative elements with regard to the organization.

A leader's negative perception of the organization may also lead to negative behavior in the workplace, which can be followed by the subordinates. Team members typically see their leader as a role model and will frequently adopt the leader's work behavior as a reference. Hence, the organization does not only suffer from the negative work behavior of the leader, but also from that of team members. This phenomenon can be explained by the social learning theory that was developed by Bandura (cited in Pfeffer 1982) through a vicarious learning process. The authors argue that in this kind of situation high LMX will certainly yield negative outcomes for the organization. A leader's negative work behavior will also cause a formation of negative work behavior from subordinates and collective negative work behavior (negative work behavior at the team level), which is in turn moderated by LMX quality. High quality LMX will increase subordinates' belief in the leader and make the leader a role model from whom subordinates can emulate work behavior. Psychological attachment that emerges as a result of the high relationship quality cause subordinates to try to maintain a good relationship with the leader as behaving like the leader is seen to be right and unquestioned.

Negative work behavior as discussed in this study is counter-productive work behavior (CWB). The authors have chosen this construct since the focus of this study is on negative forms of behavior at the work place which, until now, has received the greatest amount of attention by researchers (Coyne et al. 2013; Klotz and Bolino 2013; Ilie et al. 2012; Penney, Hunter, and Perry 2011; Spector 2011; Spector and Fox 2010; Jones 2009; Mount, Ilies, and Johnson 2006;

Penney and Spector 2005; Dalal 2005; Gruys and Sackett 2003; Fox et al. 2002; Sacket 2002; Fox, Spector, and Miles 2001; Vardiand Wiener 1996; Fox and Spector 1999). Several studies begin with the analysis of the construct as well as the antecedents and consequences of CWB. The authors argue that this is the case because the definition of CWB is too broad, to be effectively compared with other constructs, which are more specific, such as aggressive behavior. The measurement used for CWB is very complex, since it includes a wide range of forms of behavior, from very specific types of negative forms of behavior at the work place to a broader, more general portrayal of the phenomenon.

Similar to LMX studies, CWB also stimulates a number of studies on negative behavior at the workplace. Nonetheless, previous studies of CWB have been focused on the individual level; either the negative work behavior displayed by the leader or subordinate without taking account of the impact of collective aspects of CWB. Research into CWB has also tended to view CWB as a single effect whether it is directed towards an organization or at an individual. There have been recent studies conducted on CWB at the team level in very limited numbers (e.g., Aube et al. 2009; Aube and Rousseau 2011, 2014). While Aube and Rousseau's studies focus on team level, they are only concerned with a single effect of CWB performed by team members. They also have not looked into the collective CWB of team members' as a result of imitating and being influenced by other individual members' behavior, especially the ones with power in the team. The authors believe that the CWB will cause a ripple effect when the one who performs CWB has power in the organization, and has the respect and trust from other organizational members. The ripple effect from the leader's CWB to subordinate's CWB and team's CWB will be moderated by LMX. Thus, the CWB performed by a leader is more threatening and more detrimental to the organization because of the ripple effect of CWB.

The purpose of this study is to fill research gaps on both LMX and CWB, exploring the possibility that high LMX quality's negative impact that is related to the ripple effect of CWB. This study will contribute both to the theories of LMX and CWB, and also support practitioners by providing more detailed information on these phenomena. The next section of this article will provide explanation about CWB, LMX, developing the proposition of the relationship between the leader's and subordinate's CWB, which is moderated by LMX drawn from the social learning theory. In this study, the discussion of the antecedent of CWB is limited to the experience of injustice since research into CWB has demonstrated that this antecedent contributes a stronger relationship to CWB, both the CWB directed towards organizations and at individuals (Fox, Spector, and Miles 2001). Moreover, this study also limits its discussion on CWB directed to organizations' leaders who act on an organization level. That leader will take advantage of the good relationship with his or her subordinates to influence their behavior so it is equally likely that the subordinates will follow negative behavior.

II. Counter-productive Work Behavior (CWB)

The term Counterproductive Work Behavior was developed by Fox and Spector (1999) based on further developments of the Dollar-Miller model on aggression as a consequence of frustration. CWB can be defined as an attitude inside an organization that deliberately reduces the organizations effectiveness and harms the interests of the organization and its members (Spector and Fox 2002; Penney and Spector 2005; Lau, Au, Ho 2003; Jones 2009). Further, Mount, Ilies, and Johnson (2006), emphasized this definition by describing CWB as behavior that is directed against individuals and organizations which gives dangerous consequences to the organization. Similarly, Robinson and Bennet (1995) proposed the term deviant behavior, which then was adopted by Spector in the measurement development of CWB. Gruys and Sackett (2003) differentiated between CWB that is directed towards organizations and CWB that is directed at individuals (co-worker or supervisor).

In contrast, a number of researchers viewed CWB differently. In their meta-analysis, Lau, Au, and Ho (2003) employed the dimension of CWB in a general way, i.e., by using a construct that includes theft, production deviance, lateness, absenteeism, and alcohol abuse. However, Dalal (2005); Penney and Spector (2005); Mount, Ilies, and Johnson (2006); and Jones (2009) used two dimensions of CWB including Organizational CWB (CWB-O), which indicates negative behavior directed at the entire organization (such as theft, breaking of organizational policy, misuse of work time, coming to work late without permission, taking a longer break, etc.), and Interpersonal CWB (CWB-I), which indicates negative behavior that is directed at individuals or employees on the inside (such as insulting co-worker, insulting subordinate's ideas, making fun of someone's personal life, being rude to the subordinate, etc.).

A study on the antecedents of CWB has been carried out by Lau, Au, and Ho (2003). This study undertook a literature review from 1967 to 2001 on several topics of study related to CWB, which yielded nineteen articles dealing with the antecedents of CWB and forty empirical studies of the relations between CWB and the antecedents of CWB. Both qualitative and quantitative reviews (meta-analysis) were carried out in this study. They found many predictors of CWB and grouped them into four categories:

1. Personal Factors which include: demographics (age, sex, marital status, race); family responsibilities; personal characteristics; job satisfaction; job satisfaction related to symptoms (stress, burnout, workload); attitudinal predicator (attitude toward alcohol, violence, drug abuse); perception of job (boring; inequity); ability to be on time; motivation to be on time; pressure to be on time; and others (absenteeism predicts tardiness),
2. Organizational Factors which include: organizational physical conditions; organizational climate (technological readiness, human resources primacy, communication flow),
3. Work Factors which include: job characteristics (policy related); supervisory (support, emphasis work facilitation, team building, and communication); peer (support, work facilitation, and team building), and
4. Contextual Factors which include: weather and population.

The results of this study also supports that there is a relation between the antecedents of CWB, namely age, sex, marital status, tenure, income educational level, race, job satisfaction, and job dissatisfaction related symptoms and counterproductive work behavior, (including theft, production deviance, lateness, absenteeism, and alcohol abuse). Several antecedents which have often been used in the studies of CWB include demographic characteristics, attitudinal predictors, job satisfaction, job stressors, perceived injustice, organizational commitment, interpersonal conflict, negative affectivity, workplace incivility, and personality traits, the role of the trait anger (Lau et al. 2003; Dalal 2005; Penney and Spector 2005; Mount, Ilies, and Johnson 2006; Jones 2009; Coyne et al. 2013; Ilie, Penney, and Ispas 2012).

The results of the existing studies show that there is a significant relationship between workplace incivility, interpersonal conflict, and CWB directed at both organizations and individuals. Job stressors (such as workplace incivility, organizational constraints, and interpersonal conflict) have a significantly negative correlation with job satisfaction and correlate positively with the occurrence of CWB (Penney and Spector 2005). The perception of justice (interpersonal justice, informational justice, procedural justice, distributive justice) also has a significant correlation with CWB directed at the supervisor (CWB-S) and CWB directed at the organization (CWB-O). It shows that there is a negative correlation between interpersonal justice and CWB-S as well as procedural justice and CWB-O, partially mediated by the desire to retaliate against the superiors (Jones 2009). Other studies show that there is a direct relation between anger and CWB. When employees experience a high level of organizational stress caused by interpersonal conflict and procedural justice, the employees are more inclined to

commit CWB than they would be if the level of anger were lower. Anger is a moderating variable in the relation between the stressor (low procedural justice, conflict) and CWB. The relation between stress and CWB is stronger and more correlative for individuals who are temperamental compared to individuals who are less temperamental. (Ilie, Penney, and Ispas 2012).

The individuals' characteristics and work satisfaction can be used to predict counterproductive work behavior, both interpersonal and organizational. Personality traits and job satisfaction have a significant correlation with different levels of CWB. Job satisfaction partially mediates relations between personality traits and CWB (Mount, Ilies, and Johnson 2006). The relation between conscientiousness and CWB is negative when emotional stability is high, and positive if emotional stability is low (Penney, Hunter, and Perry 2011). The types of personality that are often used to verify this contain the following six variables regarding personality traits: Hostile Attribution Bias (HAB), Narcissism, Negative Affectivity (NA), Trait Anger (TA), Effortful Control, and Locus of Control (LOC). HAB and Narcissism greatly affect assessment and attribution to the situation, and hence will affect the CWB process. NA and TA focus on emotional responses that influence emotional reactions to perceiving a situation when someone is doing assessment. Furthermore, effort control and LOC have an influence on the relation between the intention to behave and the actual behavior. Control acts as a buffer against the urge to display aggressive behavior or CWB. Moreover, LOC is related with control perception, and this perception is influenced by the choices of the individual regarding the responses they are given (Spector 2011).

Fox, Spector, and Miles (2001) have examined the relation between perceived justice, negative emotional reaction to work, counterproductive work behavior, autonomy, and effective traits. The results of this study show that job stress, including perceived injustice, are related to negative emotions and counterproductive work behavior. Negative emotions correlate significantly with CWB, and emotions partially mediate the relationship between job stressors and CWB. Generally, we can summarize that organizational stress (constrains and injustice) have a strong correlation with CWB of both types, i.e., CWB-Organizational and CWB-Personal (Fox, Spector, and Miles 2001). Based on the research findings and meta-analyses of CWB, it is seen that research into CWB focuses on the single effect of CWB. Previous researchers did not, however, consider the impact of CWB as a ripple effect when that CWB is displayed by individuals who have subordinates or influence in the organization.

III. Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX)

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX) is a theory that was developed by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) using the term vertical dyad linkage theory. This theory is based on the social exchange theory. At its development, this theory is known by the term leader-member exchange theory. Leader-member exchange theory is a leadership theory that is included in a group of situational theories of leader effectiveness. Yukl (1989b) identified nine theories within this group, which are: (1) part-goal theory; (2) situational leadership theory; (3) leader substitute theory; (4) normative decision theory; (5) Least Preffered Cowoker (LPC) contingency theory; (6) LMX theory; (7) cognitive resource theory; (8) multiple linkage model; and (9) leader-environment-follower-interaction theory.

Leader-member exchange theory explains how a leader develops an exchange of relationships that change over time with different subordinates. Some subordinates are given greater authority, autonomy, and tangible benefit for their loyalty and other subordinates are treated differently. Different treatment is based on categorizing, for example, whether a subordinate is part of the "in-group" or "out-group." Employing this concept, studies have conducted an assessment of leader-subordinate relationship quality. A leader would assess the relationship quality with the subordinate and vice-versa. This theory then developed upper

management relationships (Yukl 1989b). The weakness of this theory in the role-making process has not received much attention, either from the theory itself or from the research implementation that used this concept in the "in-group" members' selection (Yukl 1989a).

Research in the theory of LMX has undergone significant developments starting with LMX measurement development, that uses two-item, five-item, seven-item, ten-item, and twelve-item scales use and ongoing development of LMX theory has included the following: LMX dimensions which are unidimensional and multidimensional (Dienesch and Liden 1986); LMX as an antecedent of the formation of innovative team (Gajendran and Joshi 2012) and team member's self-efficacy (Liao, Liu, and Raymond 2010); LMX as a dependent variable in its relationship with justice (Erdogan, Liden, and Kraimer 2006) and supportive organizational perception (Wayne, Shore, and Liden 1997); LMX as a predictor of employee turnover (Vecchio 1985); LMX as a variable that mediates the relationship between subordinate's mastery orientation and in-role job performance/innovative job performance (Janssen and Yperen 2004), and the relationship between person-supervisor fit (Vianen, Shen, and Chuang 2011); LMX as a moderating variable in the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (Wang et al. 2005); team member's LMX differentiation moderating the relationship of team member's LMX quality and team member's self-efficacy; to the relationship of LMX with positive outcomes (Gerstner and Day 1997).

LMX research has concluded that high-quality relationships between leaders and subordinates will contribute positively to organizations without having regard for whether those relationships will benefit the organizations. Thus, researchers tend to suggest increasing and maintaining the leader-subordinate relationship quality as part of the research method's practical implications. Yukl (1989b) considered the LMX theory under the situational theories of leader effectiveness; hence, the author argues that LMX will only have a positive effect on an organization in certain situations, i.e., when the leader displays a positive perception, attitude, and behavior toward the organization. On the contrary, when the leader displays a negative perception, attitude, and behavior toward the organization, high leader-member relationship quality will have a negative impact on the organization.

IV. Developing Propositions of the Relationship between Leader CWB and Subordinate CWB Moderated by LMX

Social learning theory states that individual behavior is learned from the social environment that one lives in through the process of observational learning (Wood and Bandura 1989). The individual makes an observation of the people around, and selects role models among those people. Persuasiveness or pressure from the social environment will lead an individual's behavior to become similar to that of the role models' (Yukl 1989). An employee who works at an organization will look for role models who are close, and those role models are likely to be a supervisor or a co-worker. When the role model shows negative behavior at the workplace, it will affect that employee's behavior in a counterproductive manner. This influence will be stronger there is a high interdependence between them. This interdependence will be created when the relationship between the employee and the role model is strong.

Leaders' influence on subordinates is very strong in the process of influencing subordinates' behavior. Leaders have the tacit power to determine the future of their subordinates since leaders have authority over job security and resource allocation. A leader has two major roles when viewed from the subordinate's point of view, i.e., leader as a representative of organization and leader as an independent agent. Leader as a representative of the organization means that all the authorities owned by a leader are from the organization. All tasks given by the leader to the subordinate come from the organization. Employees also may see their leader as an independent agent who will fight or defend their interests (Eisenberger et al. 2010). The interaction process between leaders and subordinates will form a social relation between them and a high quality

relationship that will lead to commitment to the leaders (Vianen, Shen, and Chuang 2011); thus, psychological closeness between them will be formed.

The social exchange perspective states that the relationship between an employee and an organization is based on reciprocity; there is a mutual exchange of resources between them. If an employee feels that what he gives to the organization is not equal to what he receives from the organization, then the employee perceives an injustice. Unfair treatment from the organization to the leader may result in the leader's performing CWB in an effort to return the unfairness from the exchange relationship. The CWB performed by the leader will be seen by the subordinates or team members, and the leader will likely defend his given working behavior. Pfeffer (1981), cited in Mowday and Sutton (1993) said that one of the most important tasks of a leader is giving explanation, rationalization, and legitimacy of his behavior in the organization. A leader will provide information and explanation to his subordinates based on his feelings and understandings of what is required. Information from the leader to the subordinates may create anticipatory injustice to the organization. If the leader is not treated fairly by the organization, this perceived injustice may also be experienced by the subordinates. They will carry out CWB not because of self-motivation, but because of the received information from the leader. The subordinates will, in this case, demonstrate work behavior consistent with the leader since they perceive the leader's behavior as an effort of avoiding mistreatment by the organization. Further, if the subordinates see that the leader's performed CWB toward the organization does not receive any negative consequences from the organization, the behavior adoption process may become stronger.

The process of adopting leader behavior will tend to strengthen when the relationship quality of leader-subordinate is high. High LMX quality will lead to the subordinate's commitment to the leader so that the subordinate will always support the leader and be like him. The subordinate's commitment to the leader is the cause of the subordinate's refusal to seek information from other parties in order to evaluate the truth of the given information by the leader. High LMX causes the subordinate to adopt information from the leader; hence, the LMX quality will moderate the effect of the Leader's CWB on the subordinates CWB. The authors argue that the amount of LMX strength in moderating the relationship between Leader CWB and Subordinate CWB will also be influenced by the culture of the organization. Employees who demonstrate a high hierarchical or paternalism culture will show more respect to leaders and regard them as de facto parents; thus, the strength of LMX quality as a moderating variable will be greater in a paternalism culture. In summary we offer the following propositions:

> Proposition 1: LMX quality will moderate the effect of CWB-Leader on CWB-Subordinate (Individual Level)
> Proposition 2: LMX strength in moderating the effect of CWB-Leader on CWB-Subordinate will be stronger in paternalism culture.

Thus individuals who perform CWB by adopting their leader's behavior will see the work behavior of co-workers in the team from this perspective. Individuals under the same leader will experience a vicarious learning process. The adoption process will also be stronger when they witness other co-workers affected by the Leader behavior CWB at a collective level (team level). Each team member will support the work behavior of each other, which will create a CWB climate at a team work level. Robinson and Kelly (1998) in their study found that antisocial behavior can happen at the team work level. The longer that individuals experience the social environment that supports antisocial behavior, the stronger the adopting process will be. Robinson and Kelly also argue that culture may affect the influence likelihood of subordinates adopting some behaviors. An employee who lives in a collective culture will prefer to see himself as a part of a social group, prioritize the group interests, maintain the harmony of the group, and have high homogeneous behavior. Thus, the effect of CWB-Leader to CWB-Team will be stronger in a collective culture. In summary we offer the following propositions:

Proposition 3: LMX quality will moderate the effect of CWB-Leader on CWB-Team Work (Team Level)

Proposition 4: CWB-Subordinate (Individual) will mediate the effect of CWB-Leader on CWB-Team Work

Proposition 5: Culture will influence the strength of mediation of CWB-Subordinate (Individual) in the influencing process of CWB-Leader to CWB-Working Team. Specifically, CWB-Subordinate (individual) will be stronger in collective culture in the influencing process of CWB-Leader to CWB-Working Team
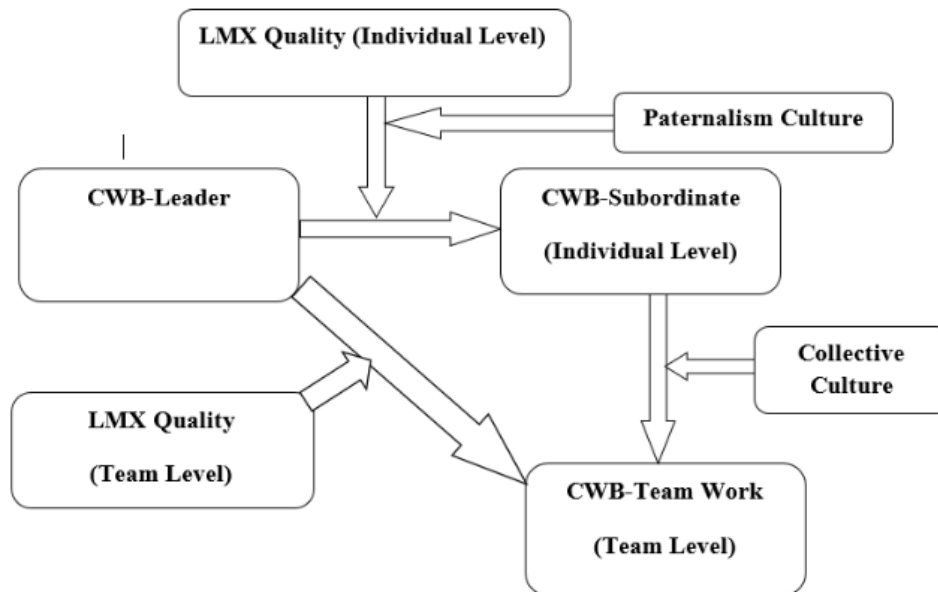

Figure 1: Conceptual Model Proposed.

V. Conclusion

CWB performed by leaders will likely cause CWB for subordinates both at the individual and team levels. The ripple effect process will be moderated by high LMX quality. Thus, when an employee in a high position— an employee who has subordinates—engages in CWB, the effect of that CWB is not only from that individual, but also from his subordinates. The higher the LMX quality, the faster the ripple effect of CWB will be. This study provides a greater understanding of why high LMX quality does not always give positive outcomes for organizations, and also why CWB carried out by leaders will give a ripple effect. This study also raises concerns about workplace culture and recommends further study of processes related to workplace communications. However, due to the complexity of culture related models, complicated analytical tools are needed for this exploration. The model provided above and the propositions provided are a significant step in the development of these analytical tools. This study has shown that LMX quality plays an important role but that this role can be either positive or negative. This level of evaluation will allow organizations to establish the impact (positive or negative) and then provide intervention quickly, addressing negative LMX before it becomes imbedded across the entire organization (the ripple effect).

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