The Workplace Social Exchange Network: A Multilevel, Conceptual Examination

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The Workplace Social Exchange Network

A MULTILEVEL, CONCEPTUAL EXAMINATION

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In this article, the authors present a framework (the Workplace Social Exchange Network) that draws from multiple streams of social exchange research. The authors attempt to provide an integrative, cross-level theory for understanding the diverse social exchanges that occur in the workplace. Within the workplace, there are a number of social exchanges that may take place between an individual and (a) the organization, (b) their supervisor, and (c) their work group. Surprisingly, researchers have overlooked the influence of social exchanges between employees and their work groups. To the authors' knowledge, this is the first article that collectively discusses the influences and interactions between the three predominate social exchange domains. In addition, the authors provide testable propositions that specify relationships between domains of exchange relationships, moderating organizational factors, and employee outcomes.

Management research has focused extensively on the nature of employee-centered social exchange relationships in the workplace. Seers, Petty, and Cashman (1995) attributed the emphasis on these relationships to the belief that these reciprocity-based exchanges are predictive of employees exhibiting positive work behaviors (e.g., extra-role behaviors, lower intention to quit) and attitudes (e.g., higher job satisfaction). The two exchange relationships that have received the most attention are the supervisor-employee exchange (typically conceptualized as leader-member exchange—LMX) and the organization-employee exchange (often conceptualized as perceived organizational support—POS) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Both the LMX and POS literature shows that employee perceptions of the quality of their exchange with

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their supervisor and the organization overall relate to their performance and attitudes (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991).

Although exchanges with their supervisor and the organization itself are important for employees, we feel that the exchange dynamics in organizations are not complete without consideration of employee exchanges with another very important organizational entity—the work team. Despite the growing use of work teams in organizations (e.g., Gordon, 1992), very little research has focused on the work team–employee exchange, or team-member exchange (TMX) (see Seers, 1989; Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995). It is plausible that all three of these exchanges not only contribute individually to the explanation of positive work outcomes but that they contribute simultaneously as part of a workplace social exchange network.

Recently, researchers have begun testing integrative models of organizational and supervisor exchange relationships. Settoon et al. (1996) found that POS and LMX are complementary in predicting positive employee attitudes and behaviors. POS was primarily associated with employees' commitment and involvement with the organization, whereas LMX was primarily related to employees' extra-role, citizenship behaviors. Because TMX is a relatively unexplored concept, there is no research that simultaneously considers POS, LMX, and TMX, although all are theoretically based in social exchange. In fact, Seers et al. (1995) noted the need for this integrative approach and the existence of similar calls in articles that were exploring other social exchange phenomena. The need for a more holistic integration and exploration of these diverse exchange relationships has been identified by other researchers (e.g., Liden et al., 1997; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). These calls are consistent with Morgeson and Hofman (1999), who have suggested that the integration of variables across a variety of levels in an organization will provide a more veridical account of the phenomenon of interest. Consistent with these suggestions, we offer the Workplace Social Exchange Network (WSEN).

In this article, we propose and examine the implications of a multilevel WSEN that integrates employee exchanges with their supervisor, work team, and organization as a whole. The three exchanges clearly do not exist in isolation, and we feel that considering the exchange networks simultaneously and integratively will enhance our understanding of the overall exchange dynamics occurring in the organization that ultimately influence employee decisions to reciprocate behaviorally and attitudinally.

The WSEN that we propose takes a multilevel theoretical approach to exchange dynamics. Specifically, we attempt to "bridge the gap" (Klein, Tosi, & Cannella, 1999) between micro foci (e.g., employee needs) and macro foci (e.g., organizational structure and culture) to explore how they might influence the overall nature of the exchange network and particularly the salience of certain exchanges for employees. Our multilevel approach encourages us to consider multiple levels of analysis and situational forces that might act simultaneously to influence the relationships (Sundeep & Walsham, 1997) and closely examine context as it relates to individual processes, thus providing insight into a behavior's likelihood of occurrence (Klein et al., 1999). Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian (1999) described the efficacy of multilevel theories this way: "Because they simultaneously and interactively examine how agency at one level of analysis can interact with, and influence, that at other levels, they [multilevel theories] afford a means of describing the ever-more-complex and ever-changing organizational landscape" (p. 304).

Before introducing our WSEN, we feel a brief review of social exchange theory is called for. Following this review, we will present the WSEN, examine the nature of the exchanges occurring within it, and make propositions regarding the nature of those exchanges and their relevant salience for employees based on micro and macro contextual features of the overall network.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Beginning in the 18th century, social philosophers such as Adam Smith struggled with understanding the mechanisms behind the establishment of social relationships. In his writings, Smith (1850) proposed,

> Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this: Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. (p. 7)

According to most exchange theorists, social exchanges between individuals are anchored in self-interest and are characterized by interdependency or mutual dependency (Huston & Burgess, 1979). Although early theorists generally agreed on the need for social exchanges, their divergent schools of thought were a propelling force influencing two camps to emerge in a polemical argument as to which of the traditions were superior. For example, George Homans, who is often recognized as the founder of the "individualistic" approach, was a sociologist. His utilitarianistic theory places individuals' wants and desires at the center of social action. Conversely, Ekeh (1974) suggested Claude Levi-Strauss's work, anchored in an anthropological perspective, was the catalyst for the "collectivist" approach of social exchange.

Rather than self-interests, the collectivist approach asserts social actions gain prominence if they contribute to the existence of society. Interestingly, Ekeh (1974) suggested Levi-Strauss's theory was also an irritant that compelled Homans (1961) to derive his individualistic theory of social exchange. With this in mind, we will begin with a review of Claude Levi-Strauss.

In 1949, in an attempt to explain kinship marriages, Levi-Strauss developed a theory of social exchange processes. Within his collectivist theory of social exchange are two assumptions: First, social exchange is solely exhibited by humans, and secondly, although individual self-interests may play a small part in the process, they alone cannot sustain social exchange. Hence, Levi-Strauss's generalized model of social exchange allows for multiparty interactions that aid in explaining much more than the restricted model (i.e., individualist), which limits social exchange to two parties (Levi-Strauss, 1969).

Levi-Strauss (1969) distinguished between the two approaches of social exchange with his proposition of univocal reciprocity. Explicit in this proposition is that the number of persons involved in any social exchange must at a minimum equal three. Hence, Levi-Strauss suggests Actor A provides some benefit to Actor B but does not expect reciprocation. Yet A trusts that eventually someone else, say Actor C or Actor D, will provide an equal benefit to A. Through these complex exchange mechanisms, Levi-Strauss was able to make the cogent argument for the multiparty model's explanatory power over a more limiting, individualistic (e.g., dyadic) exchange perspective championed by Homans (1961) and later by Blau (1964).

Paradoxically, it was Levi-Strauss's assertion that social exchanges were driven entirely by the need to build social networks, thus integrating social exchange actors, that led to Homans and Schneider's (1955, as cited in Homans, 1962) and later Homans's (1961) antagonism of the collectivist theory (Ekeh, 1974).

Proclaiming himself an "ultimate psychological reductionist," Homans's (1961) restricted exchange model (or, as he called it, "individual self-interest theory") is an attempt to combine psychology and economics for the purposes of explaining social exchange. In defining social exchange, Homans (1961) asserted "two men are in face to fact contact, and each is rewarding the other directly and immediately: each is enabled to do his work better here and now" (p. 4). Explicit in his perspective is that social exchange is dyadic in nature and that the exchange in rewards (or punishments) is direct, actual behavior and not just a norm stating what the behavior should be (Homans, 1961). Thus, although Levi-Strauss's generalized exchange operates on the assumption of univocal reciprocity, mutual reciprocity is the underlying principle of restricted exchange.

Following the individualists' tradition, Blau's (1964) exchange theory attempted to strengthen Homans's conceptualization of the economic basis of social exchange. Blau suggested social exchange occurs when "an individual is attracted to another if he expects associating with him to be in some way rewarding for himself, and his interest in the expected social rewards draws him to the other" (p. 20). Ekeh (1974) noted Blau's exchange theory is suggestive of calculating individuals attempting to maximize their gains from social interactions. Nowhere is this assumption more salient than in Blau's (1968) discussion on the formation of trust during social exchanges:

> Social exchange requires trust. . . . Typically, however, social exchange relations evolve in a slow process, starting with minor transactions in which little trust is required because little risk is involved and in which both partners can prove their trustworthiness, enabling them to expand their relation and engage in major transactions. Thus the process of social exchange leads to the trust required for it in a self-generating fashion. (p. 454)

Ekeh (1974) noted three important principles that should be gleaned from Blau's exchange theory. First, although Blau asserted his theory incorporates collectivist and individualist ideologies, it is in fact a theory of restricted exchange principled in mutual reciprocity. Second, the formation of a high-quality exchange relationship characterized by trust takes time. Lastly, trust is earned, not simply presumed to exist between the exchanging parties. Ekeh (1974) contended Blau's ad hoc implications regarding the Actor have led Blau to negate Gouldner's (1960) "fundamental and ubiquitous norm of reciprocity." This is an interesting, albeit important, statement because recent social exchange researchers oftentimes conjoin Blau's and Gouldner's theories into their work.

It is important to note that the exchanges occurring between employees and others go well beyond simple economic exchange. Although some exchange may be purely instrumental with the payoff being money, social exchange elicits positive affect, trust, and kinship. "Only social exchange tends to engender feelings of personal obligation, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not" (Blau, 1964, p. 94). The attitudes and behaviors exchange participants offer to each other are offered for reasons far beyond guilt. They are inspired behaviors that are reciprocated during the exchange process. Social exchange (which had previously been called psychological exchange in early social exchange literature—e.g., Homans, 1961) involves obligations that are unspecified and lacking a standard of value. Thus, in a social exchange, participants are not prioritizing equivalencies in value, as opposed to economic exchange, which clearly defines what will be exchanged and at what time reciprocation will occur (Liden et al., 1997).

In sum, the diverse theories on social exchange suggest that exchange can be viewed dyadically or systemically, that it can support individualistic or collectivist goals, and that the exchange can be based on emergent norms of reciprocity or calculations of instrumentality. In our view, these contrasting arguments point to the inherent complexities of the multitude of social exchanges within which individuals find themselves. Although not meant to resolve the debates we have highlighted, we feel our WSEN does integrate these seemingly divergent perspectives.

THE WSEN FRAMEWORK

Our proposed WSEN framework is depicted in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, at the heart of the network are the exchanges occurring between the employee and the organization, their supervisor or leader, and their work team. The underlying nature or quality of each of these exchanges is represented by POS, LMX, and TMX, respectively. As shown in Figure 1, each of the parties in the exchange network have exchange "currencies" (things they can offer the other parties) available to them. Figure 1 also attempts to capture the permeability between the organization, supervisor, and team. Finally, the WSEN framework emphasizes the importance of organizational structure and culture and employee needs on the salience, relevance, and opportunities for each of the core exchanges. The specifics of this framework are addressed in more detail in the following sections.

EXCHANGE RELATIONSHIPS

Our WSEN focuses on three key social entities that have exchange relationships with employees—the organization, the supervisor/leader, and the work team. The supervisor and the team are both entities that exist within the context of the organization. The dotted lines around the supervisor/leader and team represent the permeability of their boundaries with the organization. For example, it is easy to think of the supervisor being a surrogate for the organization in the mind of an employee. Likewise, in some organizations, the team becomes a surrogate for the overall organization in the mind of the employee. In addition, as depicted by the dotted boundaries and the double-headed arrow, the supervisor and team boundaries are not always distinct and they can influence each other. For example, in some circumstances, the supervisor is viewed as being part of the team. In some organizations, the

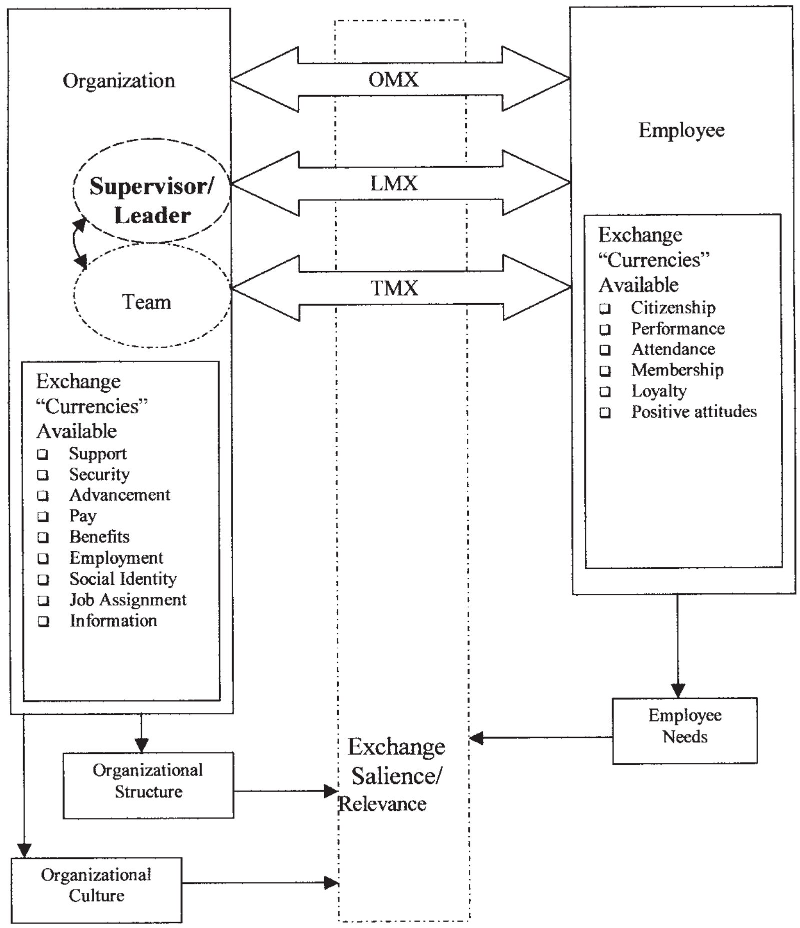

Figure 1: Framework for the Workplace Social Exchange Network
NOTE: LMX = leader-member exhange; TMX = team-member exhange; OMX = organization-member exchange

team, supervisor, and organization almost merge into one entity with regard to the exchange with the employee. For example, in a highly cohesive, integrated culture, to acquire social identity from the team would also require acquiring it from the organization—team members would reject anyone who rejected the organization.

It is important to note that the team is made up of individual members with whom an employee may have distinct and very important social exchanges. It is also possible that some members of the team are more central to the exchange than others. Despite this obvious role of individual peers in the overall exchange network, we have elected to ignore them at present to avoid the incremental increase in complexity such peer exchanges would necessitate. This approach is consistent with Seers's initial conceptualization of the Team Member Exchange construct (Seers, 1989). However, we would suggest that future efforts along this line are warranted.

EXCHANGE QUALITY

Each of the three exchange relationships depicted in our WSEN framework is represented by a double-headed arrow and labeled with the traditional measure used to capture the quality of that particular exchange. Each of these quality concepts is reviewed next.

Perceived organizational support. Unfortunately, there is no current concept or measurement of the overall quality of organization-member exchange. POS is the primary surrogate of such a concept but emphasizes more the perception of the quality of support for the employee provided by the organization; the quality of what employees provide in exchange for that support is implied. Utilizing a social exchange framework, POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501) asserts employees develop "global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being." The authors suggested that as employees' various needs are met, a perception or belief about how the organization feels about them is formed. If the belief is positive, employees perceive an imbalance between their contributions and the support provided by the organization. Hence, to have a more equitable relationship, employees increase their levels of commitment and effort for/toward the organization. For example, an employee who feels appreciated or believes the organization is concerned about the employees' well-being is likely to reciprocate with prosocial acts such as reduced absenteeism and increased effort to carry out conventional job responsibilities (e.g., Brief & Motowidlo, 1986; Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). Shore and Wayne (1993) have suggested that POS creates feelings of personal obligation in employees that lead to positive organizational behaviors. In addition, Brief and Motowidlo (1986) and Organ (1988) have found that affective commitment to the organization may spring from perceived support by the organization, leading to positive citizenship behaviors.

Leader-member exchange. Of the three exchange relationships we focus on, LMX is by far the most well-researched. Liden et al. (1997) posited leadership as a unique dynamic that occurs between each supervisor and employee dyad. The nature of such relationships creates an environment of reciprocity between the supervisor and the employee. LMX research recognizes the effect supervisor-employee relationships have on the employee's behavior and the organization and has been the subject of many studies (e.g., Nadler & Tushman, 1997; Schriesheim, Neider, & Scandura, 1998; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997).

Interestingly, early LMX research (Graen, 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975, Liden & Graen, 1980) ignored the social exchange literature, relying instead on a role-making approach to explaining the development of the supervisor-employee dyad. Graen's initial conceptualization of LMX was drawn from an emphasis on the valued resources that each part of the dyad could offer each other (Graen, 1976). Central to this development was a discussion of how the employee traded or contributed behavior "above and beyond the job description" in return for influence with the leader (Liden et al., 1997). Graen and Cashman (1975) utilized Katz and Kahn's (1978) role theory as the explanatory tool in the development of their LMX theory. Even though the early theory explored exchanges between the leader and the employee, it focused on the instrumentality of the exchange with respect to the development of roles in the dyad.

More recently, researchers have begun to address the social exchange component of LMX and examine the "currencies" being exchanged (see Liden et al., 1997, for a detailed discussion). Cook and Whitmeyer (1992) suggested that a richer conceptualization of LMX is only possible when viewed through a social exchange lens, with its focus on what is given and received by whom and for what reason in the exchange. In addition, they asserted that LMX research should move beyond the dyadic emphasis to examine that exchange within the context of a network of other exchanges involving the employee and leader (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Current operation- alization of the LMX emphasizes the perceived quality of the exchange relationship and particularly examines the exchange of positive affect, loyalty, respect, and contribution (Liden & Maslyn, 1998).

In a recent meta-analysis, Gerstner and Day (1997) reported high-quality relationships between supervisors and their subordinates positively influence work experiences, including performance and affective outcomes (e.g., overall satisfaction, organizational commitment, and role clarity). More important, the authors found significant negative associations between high-quality relationships and turnover intentions. In addition, high LMX employees exert more effort on activities that are not associated with their core job tasks and responsibilities (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997).

Team-member exchange. TMX is defined as an "individual member's perception of his or her exchange relationship with the peer group as a whole" (Seers, 1989, p. 119). First offered by Seers (1989), TMX was proffered as a construct similar to LMX. It is complementary to LMX when utilized as predictors of job attitude outcomes (Seers, 1989). In addition, TMX has been found to be a useful predictor of job satisfaction, satisfaction with peers, job performance, identification, commitment, and turnover (Hellman, Witt, & Hilton, 1993). Team members will use the reciprocal behaviors inherent in a social exchange to reinforce individual roles and identity both within the group and for the group at large (Seers et al., 1995).

The importance of this construct is its ability to fill in the "missing piece" (i.e., LMX and POS were already well-established in the research) of the social exchange network. Although the construct is almost 10 years old, it has not been utilized as part of a holistic approach to explaining the entire social exchange experience an employee encounters. It is important to note that TMX is not a substitute for cohesion or satisfaction with peers. These are distinct constructs that are capturing different parts of the employee's affective response to the team environment (Seers, 1989). In general, TMX is capturing an employee's willingness to exert extra-role behaviors that help other team members and the team (in general) accomplish their goals. The extra-role behaviors are the outcome; the level of TMX is the antecedent.

EXCHANGE CURRENCIES

Each participant in the social exchange process offers the others certain currencies or benefits or outcomes. The exchange of these currencies is the basis of the exchange relationship. The value of these currencies is judged by the recipient of them. A party is unlikely to reciprocate in exchange for a currency that is of little value to them. The value assigned to any particular social currency will depend on the particular characteristics and needs of the individual or group. We now turn to examining the types of social currencies offered by employees and the social entities with whom they interact.

Organization-, supervisor-, and team-provided currencies. Although it is possible that the social entities with whom employees interact may have different currencies at their disposal, it is also possible that any one such entity could possess that currency. For this reason, we lump the currencies provided by the organization, the supervisor, and the work team into one category. For example, although a work team might not typically be able to provide pay, there are some situations in which self-managing work teams do. Obviously, there are myriad currencies that could be provided to employees. Here, we focus on those that are most likely to be valued by employees.

The nature of social exchanges demands that the organization, the leader, or the work team must provide something of value to the employee to initiate/maintain/conclude an exchange. Liden et al. (1997) broadly identified currencies or contents of exchange that they believed were salient in the LMX context: contribution, loyalty, affect, and professional respect. Given that LMX, POS, and TMX share similar theoretical roots, it is plausible that the benefits employees receive from the respective relationships are similar and can fall into the same dimensions.

Affect is defined as general liking between individuals (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Affect can be positively manifested as gestures of affection, empathy for personal issues, or unsolicited support (Cappella, 1981). Affect is often offered without expectation of reciprocity and generally does not yield instant returns (Liden et al., 1997). Loyalty is conceptualized as public displays of support (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). This outcome is often presented in times of negative situational factors (i.e. an outside entity is interacting with another member of the exchange in a negative manner). This is an example in which there is no expectation for immediacy of response but reciprocation is expected as it engenders trust, liking, and so forth (Liden et al., 1997). Contribution is the members' perception that the other member is invested in the goals (both stated and unstated) of the exchange relationship. This investment is viewed in work-related effort or contribution (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Contribution is hypothesized as having a strong quid pro quo component that allows for equity comparisons (Heneman, Greenberger, & Anonyou, 1989). This is not to say that contribution demands equity or that it is an economic (as opposed to social) exchange outcome. Rather, of the four outcomes described, it is the one closest to an economic exchange. Professional respect is considered an essential component of leadership (Bass, 1990). Professional respect taps into the perception that an individual within the dyad is perceived to excel at their respective position (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Reciprocity and immediacy are not expected as a result of giving professional respect to another member of the exchange (Liden et al., 1997).

Marcus and House (1973) conceptualized the behavior of leaders in exchange dyads a bit differently. They broke exchanges into two gross categories: instrumental and expressive. Instrumental outcomes would be similar to those explored previously and identified as economic exchanges. Of interest are expressive outcomes. Marcus and House identified two basic types of expressive outcomes that both fall under the rubric of ego-enhancing:

accepting suggestions and complimenting performance. Accepting suggestions reinforces to the employee that they are evaluating job situations in a credible and appropriate manner. Complimenting performance is enhancing (thus providing benefit) because the compliment arises from one who is socially recognized as capable of evaluating performance (Marcus & House, 1973). These behaviors are consistent with the human relations model of supervisors (Likert, 1959), which posited that expressive behaviors on the part of the supervisor would lead to loyalty, job compliance, and job information (Marcus & House, 1973).

Employee-provided currencies. Employees must also offer valued currency in the exchange interaction. In exchange for quality offering from the organization, supervisor, or work group, employees are expected to reciprocate with more positive personal attitudes and positive behaviors than employees who have low-quality exchange relationships. Of course, such currencies are not offered equally to each partner in the exchange network; research by McNeely and Meglino (1994) reported that employees' reciprocation behaviors are directed toward the initiator of the benefits (McNeely & Meglino, 1994). Employee-offered currencies discussed in the empirical literature are a number of outcomes, traditionally categorized as personal attitudes and behaviors. These outcomes represent what the employee does in an effort to reciprocate benefits provided by the leader, organization, or team.

Attitudinal currencies that employees can offer others include satisfaction, commitment, liking, and trust. Settoon et al. (1996) reported the exchanges between the individual and the organization were associated with low turnover intention and high job satisfaction. This organization-individual exchange relationship has also been reported to increase an employee's willingness to adopt new behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Utilizing structural equation modeling, Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) were able to reveal that POS was a more powerful predictor of an employee's organizational commitment than was the exchange relationship between employees and their supervisors. However, the supervisor-individual dyad is consistently reported to exhibit positive correlations with organizational commitment as well (Duchon, Green, & Taber, 1986; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995). Supervisor-employee exchange dyads have also been reported to be associated with employees' overall satisfaction (e.g., Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982) and supervisor satisfaction (e.g., Duchon et al., 1986). In addition, Seers (1989) reported positive associations between several facets of job satisfaction, internal work motivation, team cohesiveness, and supervisor ratings and social exchanges between team members. Hellman et al. (1993) extended Seers's work with team member exchanges by including organizational commitment, which was reported to exhibit positive relationships with team members' exchanges.

Examples of behavioral currencies include absenteeism, turnover, and innovation. In their research involving the POS, Eisenberger et al. (1990) indicated quality exchanges increased levels of innovative behavior. Likewise, other workplace behavior such as increased employee performance is also reported to be related to POS (Settoon et al., 1996). Similar to Eisenberger et al.'s findings, exchanges between the supervisor and employee have been reported to be related to innovative behavior (Scott & Bruce, 1994). Quality exchanges between the supervisor and individual were shown to relate to performance ratings (Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993), objective performance (Graen et al., 1982), and low turnover intention (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Schiemann (1977) was the first to point out that LMXs were positively related to communication frequency, which is known to be associated with satisfaction and performance. Anderson and Williams (1996) were able to show a relationship between the quality of the supervisor-employee dyad and the employee exhibiting organizational citizenship behaviors. Similar to the other social exchange domains, exchanges between team members has been reported to relate with performance (Seers, 1989) and work role identification as well as team members' rate of turnover (Hellman et al., 1993).

EXCHANGE SALIENCE, RELEVANCE, AND OPPORTUNITY

The WSEN framework is intended to depict complementary (as opposed to mutually exclusive) exchanges between the organization, supervisor, work team, and employee. Despite the spate of studies integrating any of the three exchanges, we feel that the salience and relevance of, and the opportunity for, each of the exchanges varies based on the context. For example, an exchange with a very marginal employee may not interest a supervisor. And obviously, an employee cannot have an exchange with a work group that does not exist.

Employee needs. At the most basic level, the salience of an exchange will depend on the degree to which currencies are offered that are valued by the parties. For example, an organization that only offers pay is unlikely to successfully engage an employee who just won the lottery in an exchange relationship. Obviously, the host of important individual differences and their expression as needs desired to be met in an exchange relationship are beyond the scope of the present article. However, simplistically speaking, employees bring with them varying levels of intrinsic, extrinsic, and affiliation needs that they hope to fulfill as a result of their social exchange relationships. Our framework suggests that they can barter for the fulfillment of these needs with three key parties. The degree to which these parties have the currency to fulfill the need and the degree to which their reciprocation requirements are reasonable influence the salience of that potential exchange. At a minimum, we must assume that the employee has an extrinsic need for employment with the organization; otherwise, they would quit and remove themselves from the social network. Assuming such a need for employment, the employee has to establish an exchange with the party controlling the employment currency—in most cases, the supervisor as an agent of the organization. Thus, the salience of this exchange is minimally established. The employee will also have a certain need for affiliation and social identity. The employee must then consider which party could provide such a currency at the most reasonable "cost." Once again, a salient exchange emerges.

To the extent that an employee's needs are being met through one exchange relationship, the importance of meeting those needs in another relationship is minimized. Thus, for any particular employee need, the salience of any exchange is lessened to the extent that that need is being satisfied by another exchange. However, the salience of a duplicative-need meeting exchange could be enhanced if the perceived "cost" of that exchange were lower than the currently salient exchange. Thus, an employee seeking affiliation and social identity who has received it from the supervisor in exchange for blind obedience might switch to getting it from the work group if they will exchange it for the employee just being friendly. Such a compensatory perspective does not hold when the requirements of the exchange specify also engaging in another exchange. For example, a work group with a highly favored leader may require employees wishing to receive social inclusion from them to also seek it from the supervisor (e.g., "anyone who isn't friends with the boss isn't a friend of ours"). Likewise, the exchange relationship dictated by a supervisor may have as a requirement a specific exchange with the organization (e.g., "if you don't buy into the organization's culture, I won't give you the autonomy you desire").

Hence, the interactions between the three exchange domains are expected to be primarily compensatory. This is suggested for instances in which the organization factors would suggest that one domain should have a high degree of impact but due to situation-specific factors the relationship either is poor or does not exist. In such cases, the employee may look to augment the missing exchange relationship by adjusting the emphasis to a more positive exchange relationship. Supporting research by Major et al. (1995) indicated that when the individual's membership in their work team was unable to meet their needs, the person began to search for outside support from a supervisor.

Proposition 1: The three social exchange domains are partially inclusive, meaning each domain is complementary in nature and will relate in a compensatory manner in situations in which one or more of the individual's exchange relationships are poor or completely lacking.

Concerning a necessary level of workplace social exchange, we suggest that every employee has a minimum level of needs that the social exchange must fulfill. Otherwise, we would expect the employee's desire to remain employed with the organization will diminish over time. Within the empirical literature, researchers have reported robust relationships between the social exchange domains and an individual's intention to quit (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997). Consequently, extending this assumption to the overall WSEN seems appropriate.

Furthermore, scholars from very diverse disciplines have suggested the importance of the individual's need for social interaction. For example, McGregor (1957) stated man's "social needs become important motivators of his behavior—needs for belonging, for association, for acceptance by his fellows, for giving and receiving friendship and love" (p. 58). Similarly, evolutionary psychologists have found direct evidence that the human species have always been social animals (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Nicholson, 1997). It has been suggested that independent convergences in thought on any topic "is good reason to suspect that there is an underlying substance to what they are saying" (Ekeh, 1974, p. 195).

Proposition 2: All employees have a minimum level of social exchange that must be fulfilled by at least one of the three exchange domains; and without this minimum level being met, an employee's intention to turnover will increase proportionally to the perceived lack of exchange.

We would like to close our brief discussion of the influence of employee needs on the relative salience of the three exchange relationships by pointing out the salience of the needs themselves is not fixed. Social information exchange theory makes clear that the perceptions of the importance of certain needs and the perceptions of the value of certain currencies is heavily influenced by the interpretations and comments offered by significant others. In this way, organizations, supervisors, and team members can actually shape the salience of the currencies they offer and thus increase the salience of their exchange with the employee.

As noted by Klein, Dansereau, and Hall (1994), multilevel conceptual models can take many different forms. The form utilized in the integrative WSEN framework is the cross-level model. Hence, two higher level organizational variables and one individual-level set of variables are thought to

TABLE 1
Relationships Between Organizational Factors and Social Exchange Constructs

Description	*Perceived Organizational Support*	*Leader-Member Exchange*	*Team-Member Exchange*
Structure			
Hierarchical	β	↑	↓
Flat	↑	↓	β
Teams	↓	β	↑
Culture			
Homogenous	↑	β	↑
People	↑	β	β
Stability	β	↑	↓
Team	β	↓	↑
Outcome	β	β	β

NOTE: ↑ indicates an increase in the relative importance of that domain to the Workplace Social Exchange Network. ↓ indicates a decrease in the relative importance of that domain to the Workplace Social Exchange Network. β indicates a varied relationship determined by organizational-level factors.

interact with the three social exchange domains (i.e., POS, LMX, and TMX). That is, the relative influence of one of the exchange constructs is affected by the existence or level of the factors discussed. The organizational context factors that we propose influence the relative salience of and opportunity for the exchanges are organizational structure and culture. The individual-level variable is the employee needs (see Table 1).

Organizational structure. Organizational structure refers to the organizing principles and arrangement of the roles in the organization. Grossly conceptualized as hierarchical, flat, and team-based, these modes of structure each carry with them a proposed impact of the exchange relationships. Traditional hierarchical organizations are defined as having many layers of management, strict reporting lines, and centralized decision making (Weber, 1947). These organizations are thought to put the emphasis of decision making in the hands of the immediate supervisor and/or the headquarters of the organization. Supervisors are often viewed as surrogates for the organizational voice in such organizations. Work is accomplished by individuals and controlled/coordinated by the efforts of managers. The managers may have small spans of control that facilitate a great deal of interaction between the manager and the employee. Moreover, the majority of exchange relationships should take place between the employee and the organization and the employee and the supervisor. In such hierarchical organizations, we would expect there to be more opportunities for organization and supervisor exchanges with employees and would also expect these exchanges to be more salient than those with the work team.

Proposition 3a: Hierarchical organizations will tend to increase the salience of LMX and POS and decrease the salience of TMX.

Decentralized organizations are conceptualized as having fewer layers, wider spans of control, but not being organized around teams (Burns & Stalker, 1961). These organizations still have managers but with fewer levels of management. Spans of control are wide and interaction between employee and supervisor is less than in hierarchical organizations. Accordingly, the employee will probably have more contact with coworkers within the organization. Therefore, we expect much of the employee's need for information and support may be met by individuals other than the supervisor but not necessarily part of the employee's work group.

Proposition 3b: Decentralized organizations will increase the impact of POS, decrease the effect of LMX, and variably impact the effect of TMX based on the level of task interdependence.

Team-based organizations are conceptualized as instances in which the majority of the work is based on interdependent contributions of coworkers and in which much of the decision making regarding the work environment is left to the employees themselves (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). Here, the functions previously served by the organization are met by the team members themselves (especially coordination and information-providing activities).

Furthermore, the level of work design provided by management will vary from organization to organization as all teams will not be self-directed. Hence, the range of possible ongoings and interactions related to an individual's social network is thought to differ depending on the type of organizational structure employed at the individual's workplace. Based on this information, the following proposition is offered.

Proposition 3c: Team organizations will increase the effect of TMX, decrease the effect of POS, and variably impact the effect of LMX (based on the degree of team self-management).

Organizational culture. Organizational culture reflects the "set of shared, taken for granted, implicit assumptions that a group holds" (Schein, 1996, p. 236). These assumptions may influence how exchange relationships develop, as certain behaviors will be recognized as more valuable than others will. Thus, certain exchange relationships will be prioritized as their reciprocal behaviors will be viewed more positively and encouraged by the cultural norms. Homans (1974) suggested that homogenous groups would be likely to reinforce similar expected behaviors through strong group norms. Employees in that homogenous setting are likely to prioritize that exchange relationship. In addition, the degree to which the culture is fully assimilated and shared throughout the organization may also have an impact on the exchange relationships. Therefore, the level of the organization in which the homogenous culture is predominant (organization or team) will correspond to the exchange relationship (POS or TMX) that is prioritized (Homans, 1974).

Proposition 4: An organization/group with an ingrained, homogenous culture is likely to have a work environment in which the POS/TMX exchange relationship has a greater impact on employee outcomes than environments in which the organization's/work group's culture is nonhomogenous.

Chatman and Jehn (1994) provided a framework for discussing dimensions of organizational culture. Although they addressed seven dimensions in their framework, four appear particularly salient to this discussion: (a) people orientation, (b) stability, (c) team orientation, and (d) outcome orientation.

Chatman and Jehn's (1994) people orientation addresses an organization's disposition toward respecting others' rights, avoiding demanding behavior, and maintaining an awareness of how organizational actions will impact its employees. It is certainly plausible that these behaviors will be perceived as supportive by the employees of an organization espousing these values. For example, the Quality of Work Life literature suggests that environments that are employee friendly (e.g., empowering employees, respecting family demands, participative management styles, and so forth) engender feelings of support and commitment to the organization (Parker & Hall, 1993). Schuster, Morden, Baker, and McKay (1997) have defined employee-centered management as "a strategy for achieving high levels of employee motivation, commitment, and performance through management practices (such as participation and involvement) that emphasize attention to employee needs and goals" (p. 209).

Proposition 5: Organizations having cultures that are high in people orientation will also have exchange networks in which POS has increased emphasis relative to those organizations whose culture is not people oriented.

The stability dimension of culture is hypothesized as being regulation and rule driven, with clear lines of reporting relationships and low levels of dynamism in the environment (Chatman & Jehn, 1994). These types of situations are often found in highly bureaucratized organizations. The emphasis on reporting relationships would certainly place the exchange between employee and supervisor in a prominent position. In addition, this type of static environment does not seem conducive to team orientation.

Proposition 6: Organizations characterized as having a high stability dimension of culture are likely to have a social exchange network in which LMX has a far greater impact on employee behavior than TMX.

The third dimension, team orientation, is one in which collaboration and interdependence is embraced as part of the working environment (Chatman & Jehn, 1994). It is expected that this type of "take it for the team" environment will prioritize the social exchanges between members of a work group and across departments. In addition, the collaborative component of team orientation suggests an environment characterized by collective effort, mutual trust, and combined rewards and responsibilities. Furthermore, with the employees' workplace needs being fulfilled by other organizational members, we expect the level of an individual's dependence on their supervisor for information and resources needed for task completion to decline.

Proposition 7: Organizations characterized as having a team orientation culture are likely to have a majority of employees prioritizing TMX while de-emphasizing LMX.

The last of Chatman and Jehn's (1994) cultural dimensions to be discussed is their outcome orientation. This dimension of organizational culture emphasizes achievement, end results, and action taking. Although this is not necessarily a negative, high levels of this dimension can initiate an "ends justify the means" environment. The entity (i.e., the supervisor, the team, or the organization as a whole) that is driving this orientation would seem to have their exchange relationship emphasizing economic/instrumental outcomes. As an example, if an organization takes an unusually strong outcome orientation to the point at which the employees feel that the only relationship they have with the organization is one of utility, it is likely that the employee will seek social exchange opportunities with peers and/or the supervisor (to give and receive benefits such as affect, liking, loyalty, and so forth). As mentioned earlier, when the demand for reciprocity is immediate and expected the exchange is transactional as opposed to social. Thus, the employee would be left to seek benefits (e.g. affect, loyalty, and so forth) from the other exchange relationship opportunities.

Proposition 8: Organizations high on outcome orientation are likely to have an exchange network in which the enforcer of the outcome orientation will diminish in social exchange importance and the remaining exchange domains will increase in importance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In their editorial piece for the 1999 Academy of Management Review Special Topic Forum on multilevel research, Klein et al. (1999) offered the following with respect to the difficulties and potential barriers when conducting multilevel research:

> An interdisciplinary and multilevel work may paradoxically be at home everywhere and nowhere: of some interest and appeal to numerous disciplines and journals but of central interest and appeal to none. (p. 244)

That barrier notwithstanding, there is much to be gained by following a multilevel, collective construct approach when exploring social exchanges in the workplace. Future research should further examine the interactions between team members and their social and organizational relationships. This exploration would allow for an illumination of the types of individual and group behaviors and processes (both on an individual and collective basis) that lead to positive organizational outcomes (Klein et al., 1999). It would be useful to replicate the findings of the studies concerning the moderating effects of POS and LMX on employee attitudes and behaviors (Settoon et al., 1996; Wayne et al., 1997).

Empirical work should be extended to explore TMX contributions to employee outcomes. For example, there is some evidence suggesting TMX accounts for a significant amount of variance in job performance after LMX variance is accounted for (Seers, 1989). Furthermore, the nature of the interactions between peers (TMX), supervisor (LMX), and the organizational (POS), and their potential to moderate the quality of exchange relationships, has not been explored. It has also been suggested many employees may have multiple peer groups with whom they interact, thus the interactions regarding their partial inclusiveness to multiple groups and how the employee operates in such settings also deserves examination.

Explicit in the social exchange literature is the formation of trust that develops as the social relationships evolve. Regardless of the researcher's choice of univocal or mutual reciprocity, all involved entities (i.e., individual, supervisor, peers, and organization) have the opportunity to violate the perception of trust. It would be interesting to examine the effects when this trust is broken. Does the "violated" employee search for their social needs from another domain (e.g., TMX), decide to turnover, or simply take it with "a grain of salt"? Moreover, why do individuals remain in exchanges that are no longer satisfying? The authors suspect individual differences may play a key component in such decisions. Are there differences if the supervisor is the culprit versus team members, and how do the social exchange domains interact with the violation? When coupled with the psychological contract literature, such an examination may extend the literature in new, pragmatic ways.

Furthermore, how do the organizational factors limit social exchanges at the lower levels in the organization? An empirical testing of the WSEN would seem an appropriate beginning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Our framework has several implications for practicing managers as well. First, individual employees occupying multiple roles allows for the possibility for positive as well as negative exchange relationships. For example, it is the supervisor's responsibility to align the goals of the individual and the work teams with those of the organization. If the entities' goals become misaligned, what are the implications? An excellent example of this misalignment occurred during the Hawthorne Studies. The Western Electric Company expected efficiency and increased productivity, whereas teams of employees expected goldbricking—with an employee being physically abused if he "overproduced." Through the social exchanges, conflicting expectations can be imposed on the individual. If this becomes the case, the supervisor may have to focus on building LMX to acquire desired outcomes.

Furthermore, researchers have known for some time the importance of quality relationships between the employee and their supervisor (e.g., Graen, Dansereau, & Minami, 1972; Graen, & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and the organization (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986; Etzioni, 1961). However, with the recent trend of reorganizing around teams, the supervisor and organization may no longer be an employee's salient donor of reciprocity. This role may now be occupied by peer members who are a part of the employee's work team. For example, Seers et al. (1995) observed that interdependent, cohesive work groups that exhibited reciprocal behaviors lead toward superior group effectiveness.

With the role of donor shifting to peer group members, training team members in interpersonal skills to facilitate the development of quality exchange relationships between team members may prove to be a salient determinant of success or failure of the work group (Seers et al., 1995). Moreover, managers need to hold team members accountable for behaviors (e.g., participative, cooperative, communicative, forgiving) that encourage a high-quality exchange relationship. The accountability could be ensured through emphasizing the appropriate cultural orientation (Chatman & Jehn, 1994) as well as be reinforced through appraisal and compensation programs that reward positive work group behaviors.

In essence, supervisors should be aware that social exchanges allow for the competition of an individual's behavioral output above obligatory actions by the act of "buying goodwill" through beneficial and aversive expectations.

CONCLUSION

For years, the micro/macro level split in organizational research has been alive and well (e.g., Klein et al., 1999). Our intentions in this article are to contribute to the understanding of the social structures between the organization, supervisors, team members, and their respective work group by developing a multilevel theory of social exchange. This is accomplished in two ways. First, reviewing the early social exchange literature enables the researcher to get a much richer grasp on the essence of what many perspicacious theorists intended social exchange to explain. It is our contention that if these seminal works are not considered, a researcher purporting to utilize social exchange theory may be lacking in perspective. Secondly, because an organization's livelihood oftentimes relies on the social exchanges of its members, it would seem important to explore the complex interactions between individuals and the variables that make up their social network. We have also provided a limited number of propositions that can serve as hypotheses for empirical testing. We fervidly hope that as our WSEN theory takes hold, future scholars will continually add new variables in attempts to extend WSEN's nomological net. In addition, examining the effects of the WSEN framework on individual's workplace behavior holds implications for practicing managers. The most important may involve the supervisor's responsibility to ensure the goals of each entity are aligned and recognizing that conflict between persons may be inevitable.

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