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**Differentiated Ratings and Leadership Perceptions:
The Impact of Collectivism Orientation**

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Poster

TITLE

Differentiated Ratings and Leadership Perceptions: The Impact of Collectivism Orientation

ABSTRACT

This experiment was designed to compare differentiated ratings of LMX behaviors with consistent LMX ratings across subordinates, and their effects on perceptions of leadership effectiveness and leader interactional justice. Individuals' collectivistic cultural orientation played a moderating role in the relationship between LMX ratings and leadership perceptions.

PRESS PARAGRAPH

A leader often has unique relationships with each subordinate that can vary from high-quality to low-quality. Alternatively, leaders may treat each employee within a work unit similarly. The question of which approach appears fairer overall has recently been raised. This study examines how individuals perceive the effectiveness and fairness of a leader who has differential relationships with employees compared to a leader who has similar and consistent relationships with employees. Furthermore, a collectivistic cultural orientation appears to have an influence on individuals' perceptions of the leader's fairness.

A primary contribution of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is its emphasis on the differential types of relationships that leaders have with their various followers. Rather than assuming that leaders treat all subordinates similarly, LMX theorists have focused on the unique relationship a leader has with each single follower (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975). Leaders thus differentiate among subordinates, leading to “variability in the quality of LMX relationships” between a leader and followers (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006, p. 723).

Although its theory acknowledges the importance of examining a leader-member dyad in relation to other leader-member dyads (Sias & Jablin, 1995), LMX research has been criticized for routinely studying the dyad as though it is isolated from other relationships (Hogg et al., 2005). Isolated dyads may characterize some workplaces, but the growing use of teams necessitates examining the overall pattern of LMX relationships. With this study, our goal is to contribute to the literature on the effects of LMX relationship differentiation across subordinates.

The present experiment examines two research questions. First, how do individuals perceive the interactional justice and overall effectiveness of leaders who have a differentiated style compared to leaders who are consistent across subordinates? Second, does a collectivistic cultural orientation influence how individuals perceive differentiated or consistent relationships, and thus shape subsequent perceptions of leadership?

Development of Hypotheses

LMX Differentiation vs. Consistency

The innovative tenet of LMX theory is that leaders do not necessarily use the same

leadership style for every subordinate, but form dyadic exchange relationships that differ from employee to employee (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975). These exchange relationships may be high in quality (mutual respect and reciprocal obligations) or low in quality (the mere performance of job requirements and a lack of valued resources) (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Because of the positive performance and attitude outcomes related to high-quality LMX relationships (Gerstner & Day, 1997), researchers have recommended forming them with most followers (Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000).

However, more recent research has investigated whether there is a need for consistently high-quality relationships between a leader and all followers. Liden et al. (2006) found that greater LMX differentiation was related to increased individual performance for low-quality LMX members. LMX differentiation among group members also increased group performance when groups were high in task interdependence. Therefore, it appears that LMX differentiation within a work unit may have positive effects.

However, an alternative perspective presented by Hogg, Martin, and Weeden (2003) describes a potential negative consequence of LMX differentiation: Leaders who give the appearance of treating members differently may also be seen to treat them unfairly. This point echoes Sias and Jablin’s (1995) suggestion that “perceptions of differential superior-subordinate treatment are accompanied by perceptions of the *fairness* of such treatment” (p. 9). Vecchio, Griffeth, and Hom (1986) found that group members who perceived themselves as having a relatively high-quality LMX relationship perceived less inequity than those who perceived themselves as having a relatively low-quality LMX relationship. Sias and Jablin (1995) found that group members who were in low-quality LMX

relationships were more concerned about differential treatment than those in high-quality relationships. These studies, along with Scandura's (1999) theoretical model linking LMX and organizational justice, cement the importance of justice considerations and LMX differentiation.

There is a strong empirical relationship between LMX and interactional justice (e.g., Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000) consistent with their implicit conceptual overlap (i.e., social exchange). Interactional justice involves the fairness of interpersonal treatment, including dignity, respect, and reasonable, timely explanations (Bies & Moag, 1986). However, the relationship between the constructs has been considered in terms of the dyad only. We expect that, when viewed in the context of relationships across subordinates, differential treatment will have an effect on perceptions of overall interactional justice.

Differentiated relationships across subordinates may send the message that the leader is unconcerned about norms of consistency across individuals, implying a lack of respect and polite treatment (interpersonal justice). Differentiation may also imply preferential treatment of some unit members while neglecting other members (Hogg et al., 2005). Specifically, it may be inferred that some employees receive clearer and more specialized communication (elements of informational justice) than do others. Alternatively, differentiation may imply that the leader is able to effectively communicate varying expectations and procedures about effort and rewards. Furthermore, a leader who personalizes relationships with subordinates may be seen as respecting claims to individual dignity.

These competing explanations lead us to distinguish between differentiated LMX ratings

and consistent LMX ratings (given by subordinates) at three levels: low, moderate, and high. Leaders who differentiate in their LMX relationships are likely to be perceived as more just than those who receive consistent but low LMX ratings. The presence of some, if not all, high LMX relationships within a work unit should show that the leader is capable of interacting with subordinates respectfully, whereas consistently low ratings indicate a lack of propriety and appropriate communication.

However, leaders who receive high LMX ratings across subordinates will appear to have achieved a high level of interactional justice with each, providing higher overall perceptions of interactional justice. By comparing differentiated LMX ratings and consistently moderate LMX ratings, we contrast a leader who splits resources and time equitably (differentiation) with one who splits resources and time equally (moderate and consistent). Again, because of the high correlation between interactional justice and LMX, we propose that consistently moderate LMX ratings will result in greater overall interactional justice perceptions than differentiated LMX ratings.

The relationships between LMX ratings and interactional justice are proposed to extend to perceived leader effectiveness as well, but for different reasons. Low but consistent ratings signal that the leader has not cultivated meaningful LMX relationships across employees, indicating ineffective overall leadership. Consistently high ratings indicate that the leader enjoys working with subordinates and uses their talents well, pointing to effective overall leadership. Differentiated ratings signify an ability to foster high-quality relationships with some subordinates, although not all, which may portray reduced overall effectiveness. Moderate but consistent ratings indicate that a leader makes efforts to foster positive

relationships with all subordinates, leading to higher ratings of effectiveness compared to differentiated leaders.

Hypothesis 1: Leaders who receive different LMX ratings across subordinates are perceived to a) have more interactional justice and b) be more effective than leaders who receive consistently low LMX ratings.

Hypothesis 2: Leaders who receive different LMX ratings across subordinates are perceived to a) have less interactional justice and b) be less effective than leaders who receive consistently high LMX ratings.

Hypothesis 3: Leaders who receive different LMX ratings across subordinates are perceived to a) have less interactional justice and b) be less effective leaders than leaders who receive consistently moderate LMX ratings.

Collectivistic Cultural Orientation

Responses to differentiated LMX ratings may differ based on collectivistic cultural orientation. People who are higher in collectivism value interdependence, loyalty, and group welfare and success, whereas people lower in collectivism prefer individual initiative and independence, and value individual success (Dorfman & Howell, 1988; Hofstede, 1980).

Erdogan and Liden (2006) investigated individual collectivism as a moderator of the relationship between employee justice perceptions and LMX. They found that the interactional justice-LMX relationship was positive but weaker for those high in collectivism, probably because collectivists place more importance on loyalty, obligation, and protecting harmonious relationships, and

therefore less likely to allow lower interactional justice to affect their LMX relationships.

High collectivism may influence perceptions of LMX differentiation. When a person high in collectivism sees differentiation in LMX across subordinates, he or she may conclude that the leader is less focused on the group's welfare and more intent on individual relationships. Overall interactional justice perceptions may be negatively impacted when LMX relationships are differentiated. Those lower in collectivism, however, should not have as negative perceptions of interactional justice because they have a relative preference for individualized relationships. LMX differentiation should also affect collectivists' ratings of effectiveness, especially if they evaluate leaders based on the group's welfare and group-based success rather than on individualized leader behavior (Ensari & Murphy, 2003).

Hypothesis 4: Collectivism moderates the relationship between LMX ratings and interactional justice, such that individuals high in collectivism will perceive a differentiating leader as a) less just and b) less effective than individuals low in collectivism.

Hypothesis 5: Collectivism moderates the relationship between LMX ratings and interactional justice, such that individuals high in collectivism will perceive a consistently high-rated leader as a) more just and b) more effective than individuals low in collectivism.

Method

Participants

Participants were 240 undergraduate accounting and business administration students from a large public university in Malaysia (165 women and 75 men). Students, all voluntarily

participating, fell mostly in the age range of 20 to 23 years ($M = 21.82$; $SD = 2.16$). Self-reported ethnicity of the participants was 60.4% Malay, 29.2% Chinese, and 8.3% Indian and others.

Experimental Design and Procedure

We implemented a 4×2 between-participants factorial design: (a) ratings of leadership behavior (four conditions: differentiated, consistently low, consistently moderate, and consistently high) and (b) collectivism (two levels: high and low). Participants first completed the collectivism measure, then read a one-page scenario (independent variable manipulation) and responded to the dependent measure.

Experimental Manipulation

We created a scenario to manipulate specific experimental conditions. Vignettes such as ours allow researchers remove several potential confounds and extraneous sources of variance that other methods may introduce (Aguinis, Simonsen, & Pierce, 1998). Participants were told to examine the ratings of a supervisor, provided by the supervisor's subordinates, on 12 features of the individual relationships between the subordinates and supervisor. The 12 features were questions from Liden and Maslyn's (1998) LMX scale, which indicated the quality of the exchange relationship (e.g., "My supervisor would defend me to others in the organization if I make an honest mistake" and "I am willing to apply extra efforts beyond those normally required, to meet my supervisor's work goals).

The subordinates' ratings for each item were given to the participants using a 6-point (1 = *strongly disagree*; 6 = *strongly agree*) scale. In the differentiated condition, Rater 1 gave ratings of 4 or 3 to the supervisor on the 12 items, averaging 3.5 on the 6-point scale. Rater 2 gave

ratings of 1 or 2 (averaging 1.5), while Rater 3 gave ratings of 5 or 6 (averaging 5.5). In other words, the subordinates gave widely differing ratings of the supervisor's leadership, indicating a differentiated leadership style. In the consistent/high ratings condition, the three subordinates provided ratings of 5 or 6, with an average of 5.5. Similarly consistent ratings were given in the low and moderate conditions, but with averages of 1.5 (low) and 3.5 (moderate).

Although we hypothesized no effect of perspective of the rater, we varied the perspective of the rater to be the leader rather than the member for half of the sample, to check that the perspective of the rater would not influence others' perceptions of the leader. The manipulation was identical except that the leader's ratings of the subordinates were presented.

Measures

All measures required the participants to indicate their agreement with a statement on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Responses were averaged to arrive at an overall score for each measure (see coefficient alphas in Table 1).

Dependent measures. Leadership effectiveness was measured with five items drawn from van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg (2005) (e.g., "Jamie leads in a way which motivates employees"). Interactional justice was measured with four items taken from Colquitt's (2001) nine-item measure. Two items each from interpersonal and informational justice were used, as they were the only items that did not load on the same factor as leadership effectiveness (see the *Results* section for justification of this decision). The interpersonal items referred to the supervisor treating the subordinates with politeness and dignity. The informational items referred to candid

communication and tailoring communication to the employees' needs.

Collectivism orientation. Six items assessed the collectivism cultural orientation of the participants (Dorfman & Howell, 1988; e.g., "Being accepted by the members of your workgroup is very important"). Although there are justifiable concerns for dichotomizing a continuous variable (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002), we decided to use a median split to transform collectivism into a categorical variable because of the need to use MANOVA rather than multiple regression analyses (our two dependent variables were correlated, $r = .82$).

Results

Dimensionality and Distinctiveness of Measures

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Amos 16.0 to test the two-dimensional structure of the dependent measures, leader effectiveness and interactional justice, compared to a competing one-factor model. The CFA was based on using raw data as input and maximum likelihood estimation. However, we found that five of the interactional justice items loaded on the same factor as the leader effectiveness items. We removed those items, leaving us with the four interactional items described under *Measures*. The subsequent analysis showed that the two-factor model fit the data reasonably well ($\chi^2 = 67.56$, $df = 26$, $p < .01$; GFI = .94; CFI = .98; IFI = .98; RMSEA = .08). The competing one-factor model had poor fit indices ($\chi^2 = 158.13$, $df = 27$, $p < .01$; GFI = .85; CFI = .94; IFI = .94; RMSEA = .14).

 Table 1 about here

We conducted another CFA to test the distinctiveness of collectivism relative to the two dependent measures. The analysis showed that the three-factor model fit the data very well ($\chi^2 = 256.90$, $df = 87$, $p < .01$; GFI = .92; CFI = .97; IFI = .97; RMSEA = .06), better than the two-factor model ($\Delta \chi^2 = 97.41$, $p < .01$). In conclusion, results of the CFA and reliability analyses indicate that the measures have sound psychometric properties and provide evidence against common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

Manipulation Check

At the end of the session, we used an open-ended question for the participants to provide an overall assessment of the leader. Many (43.3%) provided comments that clarified that they had understood the scenario as intended. Furthermore, the means for the dependent variables were as expected for the three consistent leadership conditions (see Table 2). Participants in the consistently low rating condition gave lower ratings than participants in the consistently moderate rating condition, who gave lower ratings than participants in the consistently high rating condition.

Hypothesis Testing

We tested our hypotheses by implementing a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) including LMX ratings condition and collectivism orientation as the independent variables and leader effectiveness and interactional justice as the dependent variables.¹

Results from the MANOVA indicated an effect of LMX ratings, Wilks' lambda = .41, $F(6, 462) = 43.03$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .36$,² an effect of collectivism, Wilks' lambda = .96, $F(2, 231) = 4.72$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, and a ratings \times collectivism interaction effect, Wilks' lambda = .92, $F(6, 462) = 3.20$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Descriptive statistics for each indicator of

leadership perceptions as a function of LMX ratings and collectivism are displayed in Table 2.

Given the statistically significant result for LMX ratings from the MANOVA, we proceeded to test our hypotheses by conducting two-way ANOVAs for interactional justice and leader effectiveness. A main effect of LMX ratings emerged for interactional justice, $F(3, 232) = 81.98, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .52$, as well as for leader effectiveness, $F(3, 232) = 90.91, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .54$.

The first three hypotheses were tested using pairwise multiple mean comparisons (Scheffé). Hypothesis 1, which compared differentiation with consistently low ratings, was supported; the differentiating leader was rated as more just (mean difference = 1.15, $p < .001$) and effective (mean difference = 1.22, $p < .001$) than the consistently low rated leader. Hypothesis 2 was also supported; the differentiating leader was rated as less just (mean difference = -1.02, $p < .001$) and less effective (mean difference = -1.69, $p < .001$) than a consistently high leader. However, Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Although the means were in the expected direction, there were no significant differences in the ratings of interactional justice or leader effectiveness between the differentiating leader and the consistently moderate leader ($p > .05$ for both).

 Table 2 about here

Significant interaction effects of LMX ratings and collectivism were found for leader effectiveness, $F(3, 232) = 3.39, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$, and interactional justice, $F(3, 232) = 4.74, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .06$ (see Figures 1 and 2).

To test Hypotheses 4 and 5, we probed the

interaction effects using pairwise comparisons. Hypothesis 4 was not supported. High collectivism and low collectivism individuals perceived no differences in the differentiating leader's effectiveness, $F(1, 232) = 2.13, p > .05$, or justice, $F(1, 232) = .302, p > .05$. However, Hypothesis 5a was supported: High collectivism individuals perceived a consistently high-rated leader as more just than low collectivism individuals (mean difference = .50), $F(1, 232) = 6.49, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$. The same comparison for leader effectiveness (H5b), however, was not significant at a more stringent level required for several pairwise comparisons, $F(1, 232) = 4.02, p = .046$, although the mean difference was similar (.50).

 Figures 1 and 2 about here

Discussion

Our results showed that a differentiated leadership style is viewed as higher in interactional justice than a consistently low LMX style, but lower in interactional justice than a consistently high LMX style. These relationships held true for perceptions of leadership effectiveness as well. A leader who has variable relationships across subordinates may not be seen as overly high in interactional justice, perhaps because he or she deviates from a norm of consistency, which portrays injustice in the absence of other information. This finding extends the literature on the effects of LMX differentiation by showing its effect on perceptions of justice and effectiveness. Leaders need to pay attention to how differentiation may appear to others, and focus on high levels of procedural and distributive justice, which may mitigate negative effects that differentiation has on interactional justice perceptions. Furthermore, differentiated relationships are

perceived to be as fair and effective as consistently moderate LMX relationships across subordinates, indicating that differentiation is not wholly negative. Future research could examine LMX differentiation and justice in workgroups, where additional context variables can be measured.

Collectivism also appears to affect leadership perceptions, although our results indicate that it has more of an effect on perceptions of high consistency leaders. There was no moderating effect of collectivism on the relationship between a differentiated leadership style and leadership perceptions, but collectivism moderated the relationship between a consistently high LMX style and interactional justice. Collectivists rated consistently high leaders as more just and effective. This research does not answer the question of why this occurs, although we reason that collectivists' focus on group rather than individual welfare is important. Future research could examine collectivists' expectations for norms of consistency to help explain these findings.

It is somewhat puzzling as to why high and low collectivists had similar perceptions of justice for differentiated leaders. Again, it is possible that differentiation, although not as ideal as consistently high LMX relationships, is seen as a realistic and not necessarily negative style. Differentiation may satisfy collectivists' need to see elements of loyalty and interdependence, whereas it may also satisfy the individualism of those who are lower in collectivism. In conclusion, LMX differentiation among subordinates is an area that requires further study to determine its effectiveness in the team-based organizations of today.

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Footnotes

¹Initially, we conducted a three-factor MANOVA including differentiation/consistency in leader behavior, perspective, and collectivism orientation as independent variables. However, the effect of perspective was not statistically

significant, Wilks' lambda = .97, $F(3, 222) = 2.10$, $p > .05$. There were no significant two- or three-way interactions ($p > .05$). Therefore, we conducted the tests of our hypotheses without including perspective as an independent variable in the MANOVA.

²Eta squared (η^2) and partial eta squared (η_p^2) values are often reported as estimates of effect size in multifactor ANOVA. However, η_p^2 is a more appropriate estimate of effect size for this study, given that we are assessing the impact of a factor on an outcome while controlling for the impact of the other factors in the research design (Pierce, Block, & Aguinis, 2004).

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics, Coefficients Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations of Study Variables*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
1. Leader Effectiveness	4.07	1.30	.95		
2. Interactional Justice	4.14	1.10	.82**	.89	
3. Collectivism Orientation	4.90	0.96	.04	.14*	.82

Note. $N = 240$. Coefficient alphas are in boldface type on the main diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2*Means and Standard Deviations for LMX Ratings by Collectivism Orientation*

<i>Dependent Measures</i>		<i>Collectivism Orientation</i>				
<i>LMX Ratings</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>		
Leadership Effectiveness	Differentiated	Low	3.95	0.94	31	
		High	3.59	1.06	29	
	Consistent Low	Low	2.81	1.24	32	
		High	2.26	1.07	28	
	Consistent Moderate	Low	4.29	0.92	25	
		High	4.25	1.04	35	
	Consistent High	Low	5.19	0.73	28	
		High	5.70	0.66	32	
	Interactional Justice	Differentiated	Low	4.06	0.45	31
			High	4.17	0.76	29
		Consistent Low	Low	3.16	1.01	32
			High	2.75	0.92	28
Consistent Moderate		Low	4.06	0.61	25	
		High	4.54	0.72	35	
Consistent High		Low	4.87	0.76	28	
		High	5.37	0.71	32	

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Consistency \times collectivism interaction: Interactional justice.

Figure 2. Consistency \times collectivism interaction: Leadership effectiveness.



