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Abstract

Over 70% of undergraduate students hold part-time jobs while in college. Certain aspects are positively and/or negatively impacted by employment in college, such as a student's academic performance, relationships, and self-worth. As such, research examining factors that might positively influence work-related outcomes (and subsequent collegiate experiences) for student workers is warranted. The current work utilized the Leader-Member Exchange as a theoretical framework to examine how work-related factors (i.e., leadership qualities and the supervisor-employee relationship) impact job satisfaction among student workers. Seventy-eight undergraduate students completed the study. Leadership qualities and supervisor-employee relationship positively correlated with job satisfaction; however, further analysis revealed that the relationship between the supervisor and employee was a significant mediator. These findings add unique information to prior research and might be used by individuals who work with student employees. Additional implications of this work as well as limitations are discussed.

Student Job Satisfaction and Leader-Member Exchange: Relationships with Employers

According to recent estimates, over 70% of undergraduate students hold part-time (i.e., 20 hours or less each week) jobs while in college (Carnevale, Smith, Melton, & Price, 2015). Holding a part-time job can serve many purposes for undergraduate students (Darolia, 2014) including: offsetting financial burdens associated with college, providing opportunities for students to network and build relationships, and helping students to develop self-worth relevant for pursing a chosen profession. Given the number of undergraduate students who hold a part-time job, it is important to empirically consider how student employment influences the overall college experience.

Prior research suggests student employment may play a significant role in certain aspects of the collegiate experience, such as a student's academic performance, relationships, and self-worth. Stress with work-related responsibilities may negatively impact students' abilities to perform well in the classroom (Callender, 2008). Mental and/or physical exhaustion can impede a student's motivation to study and complete assignments. Alternatively, research also suggests that student employment might benefit academic performance (Darolia, 2014). The United States Department of Bureau and Labor Statistics (2008) indicates that students with part-time jobs tend to have higher GPAs compared to students who do not have a job. Students who work might have better time-management skills compared to students who do not, given that their time is split between work and school. Such skills might subsequently enhance academic performance. Further, the work environment may provide a place for students to build friendships and professional relationships among supervisors and other staff (Kulm & Cramer, 2006). Building social networks as a result of an employment opportunity may serve to empower overall student success. However, only constructive and supportive relationships are noted as having positive influences on a student's success. Poor relationships, such as with a supervisor, may produce negative impacts on both academic and professional success. Related to relationship building, self-worth also may develop as a result of employment opportunities. As students develop positive working relationships, their self-worth may improve, as relationships and self-worth are found to be interdependent (Mund & Neyer, 2016).

Taken as a whole, this research on student employment in relation to academics, relationships, and self-worth serves to enhance our understanding of how having a job as an undergraduate student can impact the collegiate experience. Due to the potential for both positive and negative results contingent upon the nature of work-related experiences, it is important to consider not only that these areas may be influenced by student employment opportunities, but also how these areas might be either positively or negatively influenced through employment. Focusing

on specific factors, such as the student's relationship with a direct supervisor and the student's overall satisfaction with the work may further enhance our understanding of how employment may be beneficial for students.

Despite an abundance of prior research having explored factors of employee-supervisor relationships and job satisfaction for adults (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Pattie, Benson, Casper, & McMahan, 2013; Peterson, Walumbwa, Avolio, & Hannah, 2012), limited empirical research has investigated these factors among student workers. Due to how impactful work experiences may be for students, research is warranted that might positively influence work-related outcomes. The current work utilized prior research on adult workers as a guide. Specifically, the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (see Volmer et al., 2011) was used a theoretical framework to examine how various work-related factors impact overall job satisfaction among students.

Leader-Member Exchange Model

Research on the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) model suggests a unique interplay of variables that contribute to overall job satisfaction, performance, and positive organizational behaviors (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Variables including leadership style and personality attributes (Liden & Maslyn, 1998) all serve to predict various work-related outcomes. The LMX model was originally designed to examine the relationship between leaders and their followers (Graen & Scandura, 1987). This model also was designed to account for the uniqueness of the leader-member relationship. The LMX model has evolved to include potential mediators and moderators of the relationship between leaders and followers (Dulebohn et al., 2012). For example, follower characteristics (e.g., personality-related variables like competence), leader characteristics (e.g., leader-style), and interpersonal relationships (e.g., trust) all serve to influence the LMX relationship. Subsequently, when LMX quality is low, consequences affecting job performance, such as turnover and role conflict, might occur; when LMX quality is high, benefits such as job satisfaction might occur.

Current research supports the tenants of the LMX model in that follower characteristics, leader characteristics, and interpersonal relationships that contribute to leader-member exchange are key to job satisfaction (Pattie et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2012). In a study published by Westchester County Business Journal (2003), finance and bookkeeping professionals developed and distributed a survey to 150 executives in the nation's largest companies.

Findings suggest that establishing open lines of communication, empowerment, and recognizing achievements were among the most important factors that subordinates valued; in fact, these factors were more important to employees than benefits. This work suggests that communication and the working relationship between employees and leaders is crucial; if employees feel that their work is valued and that they contribute to company decisions based on a leader's actions, then job satisfaction increased.

This finding was further supported in a study conducted by Ronen and Mikulincer (2012) using full-time employees. This work indicated that quality relationships between the supervisor and employee contributed to better job satisfaction. In a similar vein of research, Gilstrap and Collins (2012) collected data from professional employees of a large industrial organization. Employees who trust their supervisor experienced more job satisfaction. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of the leader-member exchange and the need for leaders to maintain quality relationships with employees (Liao, Hu, & Chung, 2009).

Given previous research findings that support the tenants of the LMX model, the current work utilized this framework as theoretical guide. However, an important limitation of prior work emerges in terms of the samples utilized. Prior research has isolated both mediating and moderating factors that might predict job satisfaction, but a majority of this research solely examines professional sectors and adult workers with full-time positions; research on student workers who hold part-time jobs is understudied. Students may differ from adults regarding work-related motivations, including long-term goals and financial needs. Given the importance of employment for young adults, such as impacted academics, relationships, and self-efficacy, as well as potential differences between student and adult workers, these gaps in current literature call for investigation into the effects of LMX on college students.

Summary of the Current Research

The goals of the current study are two-fold. First, given that academic achievement (Callender, 2008), relationships (Kulm & Cramer, 2006), and self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998) of college students might be impacted by having a job while in college, one goal of the current study was to examine job satisfaction among college students. Prior research using the LMX model supports that the quality of the relationship between the employee and manager is a strong meditating factor predictive of job satisfaction (Ronen & Mikulincer, 2012). However, a limitation of prior research is the focus on adult, full-time employees; in comparison, student,

part-time employees are understudied. Thus, the second purpose was to investigate the relationship between students' perceptions of their supervisory relationship and perceptions of their supervisors' leadership qualities, and how this determines overall job satisfaction. Based on previous research, we tested two main hypotheses.

H1: Perceived leadership qualities and the perceived relationship between the supervisor and employee will be positively related to job satisfaction, such that the better the leader and the better the relationship, the more job satisfaction will be reported.

H2: Given the importance of the supervisor and employee relationship, we predicted that this variable would serve as a significant mediator in predicting job satisfaction from leadership qualities.

Methods

Participants

Seventy-eight undergraduate students (Mean age=20.31; SD=3.86) participated. The sample consisted of 63 females and a majority identified as a first year of college student (51.3% freshman). Of these participants, 82.1% were Caucasian, 9% Hispanic/Latino(a), 5.1% African-American, and 3.8% Asian. All participants had a job at the time of the study with 47.4% working at their current job from 1-6 months and 43% having worked longer than 6 months. Sixty-eight percent worked off-campus. All students who participated received an informed consent prior to beginning the study and were debriefed at the end of the study. After having obtained IRB approval, participants were treated in accordance with American Psychological Association ethics.

Materials and Procedure

Participants completed an online survey using SurveyMonkey, wherein they read an informed consent and then responded to a series of questions related to demographic information (e.g., age; classification; race) and current job information (e.g., how long you have been working at this job; is it on/off campus?). Next, they completed the following questionnaires in random order about their leader-member relationship, their primary supervisor's leadership qualities, and their overall job satisfaction.

Leader-Member Exchange. To test the relationship between the primary supervisor and employee, we used the *Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Scale* (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). This scale has seven total items (see Appendix A). The rating system used was a 5-point Likert type scale with higher scores indicating a positive relationship between the supervisor and student employee. Although each question was rated on a 1-5 scale, the anchors for each scale varied depending on the question. For example, a scale of 1 (extremely ineffective) to 5 (extremely effective) was used for the question, ""How would you characterize your working relationship with your supervisor?" A scale of 1 (not a bit) to 5 (a great deal) was used to assess the question, "How well does your supervisor understand your job problems and needs?" A composite score was created by averaging responses to the seven questions; Cronbach's Alpha was .90, indicating strong reliability.

Leadership qualities. *The Transformational Leadership Questionnaire* (Alban-Metcalfe & Alimo-Metcalfe, 2001) was used. Thirty-seven items were included (see Appendix B) with a 5-point Likert rating (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicated better perceptions of the supervisor's leadership quality. This scale measured the following attributes related to quality leadership: integrity ("My supervisor behaves in ways that strengthen respect from staff members;"), demonstrable innovation ("My supervisor is respectful in handling staff member mistakes;") inspirational motivation ("My supervisor considers staff needs when setting new program goals;"), developing others ("My supervisor assists individual staff members in developing their strengths"), support of others ("My supervisor treats individual staff members with dignity and respect") and task delegation ("My supervisor delegates tasks that build up the organization"). A composite score was created by averaging responses to all questions; Cronbach's Alpha = .98.

Job satisfaction. We tailored items (see Appendix C) from the *Generic Job Satisfaction Scale* to be relevant for a student-worker perspective (Macdonald & MacIntyre, 1997). Four items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate more job satisfaction. The four items included: "I am happy with my job; I like working at my current job; I am good at performing the duties associated with my current job; I feel underutilized at my job" (reverse scored). A composite score was created by averaging the responses to the four questions. Cronbach's alpha was .71, indicating good reliability.

Results

To test our first hypothesis, that the perceived relationship between the supervisor and employee and the perceived leadership qualities of the supervisor would be positively related to job satisfaction, we conducted a series of bivariate correlations. Results supported this hypothesis; more job satisfaction was reported when the perceived relationship between the supervisor was rated as being positive [r (76) = .69, $p < .001$] and the perceived leadership qualities of the supervisor were rated as being positive [r (76) = .64, $p < .001$].

A mediation analysis was performed to further assess the findings that job satisfaction, supervisor-employee relationship, and leadership qualities were positively related. For our second hypothesis, we anticipated that although perceived leadership qualities are important in predicting job satisfaction, the relationship between the supervisor and employee would be more predictive of job satisfaction; this hypothesis was generated based on previous research among full-time, adult workers. The mediation analysis allowed us to examine how leadership qualities predict job satisfaction when considering the supervisor-employee relationship. The Baron and Kenny (1986) approach was used to perform the mediation analysis. Results of this analysis suggest that the relationship between the supervisor and employee served as a significant mediator [F (2, 75) = 34.09, $p < .001$]. Leadership qualities did predict overall job satisfaction initially ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$); however, this variable no longer served as a significant predictor ($p = .60$) when controlling for the supervisor-employee relationship ($\beta = .59$, $p < .004$; See Figure 1).

Discussion

This study evaluated perceptions of leadership qualities and the personal relationship with a direct supervisor among student workers; the intent of this work was to contribute a unique contribution relevant to job satisfaction, as the majority of prior research has concentrated solely on adult employees (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Pattie et al., 2013). Findings suggest that for student workers, the relationship to the supervisor is important in predicting job satisfaction beyond perceived leadership qualities. To better understand the current findings, it is important to consider that student workers might be fundamentally different than adult workers in a variety of ways; for example, student workers and adult workers differ in financial motives (Joo, Durband, & Grable, 2009). Adults are working toward a career in their chosen workforce and attend to different financial responsibilities compared to students. Student and adult workers also might differ in relation to their overall job commitment, as students could perceive fewer

consequences of leaving an organization/job (Maynard, Thorsteinson, & Parfyonova, 2006). Given these different motives for adult versus student workers, certain factors, like relationship with a supervisor, might be more or less important depending on the sample.

Leadership qualities and the nature of the relationship between an employee and leader both contribute to job satisfaction when examining adults who are employed full-time (Overall, 2015). However, the findings of the current study suggest that the relationship between the employee and leader might be more important to overall job satisfaction than leadership qualities, namely for college students who are employed part-time. Because college students might be motivated differently than average adult employees as previous research suggests, the task of inspiring job satisfaction might mean something different to students than it does to their adult counterparts. This study's findings suggest that although leadership qualities contribute significantly to students' job satisfaction, when the relationship with the leader is considered, the leadership qualities lost its significance. The relationship seems to drive job satisfaction, which could be due to the differences in work commitment (part-time/temporary job not in a chosen career path) and financial motives of the college student.

The discussed differences in financial reasoning and job commitment both might work to form a nuanced mentality towards what is important in a job for a student. In the case of a post-graduate career field and working professional, employees may value ethical and fair treatment in a leader over a positive relationship, because the long-term commitment goals require competent leadership first, and foremost. Interpersonal interactions may likely be more of a concern for students whose commitment is minimal, as their duration at the workplace lasts only a few months during a seasonal break. These interpersonal interactions may show to be more memorable than the significance of the work the student accomplished during the short period of time. Hershatter and Epstein (2010) contend that the millennial generation, those who make up current undergraduate populations from 2004 through 2022, self-report a desire for close supervisory relationships more so than other generations. Findings of the current work support this idea and add new knowledge in relation to the factors that might influence job satisfaction.

Although preliminary, the findings of the current work might be used by individuals who supervise student employees; however, it is important to note that given the sample used for the current study, the findings may apply more to students who identify as female and are in their first or second year of college. With this in mind, these findings can be taken into consideration when the question of job satisfaction is examined by supervisors. In training management,

details about the mentality of potential employees may serve to improve leadership techniques and may yield to stronger organizational productivity and job performance, namely for the type of student sampled in this current study. In terms of the general literature, this study contributes unique information concerning the relationship between college student job satisfaction and the role of leadership.

Limitations and Future Research

The size of the sample used in this study was small, considering the recommended sample size (over 100) for a mediation analysis. Fritz and MacKinnon (2007), however, suggest that a sample of about 80 participants can be adequate for detecting mediation effects. Therefore, power for the current study was adequate in relation to the mediation model tested. Contending with the racial majority of the student population on the campus used for this study, the diversity of the sample was low, as most were Caucasian females. Given these limitations, generalizing these findings to all college students who work should be done with caution. The current findings may apply primarily to freshman and sophomore students from a specific geographical location (i.e., the Midwest). Future research on this topic might benefit from including a larger and more diverse sample; doing so might help to replicate these findings and address limitations of generalizability found within the current study.

Further, future research might benefit from examining additional mediating (and moderating) factors of the LMX model, such as personality and contextual attributes, which may contribute to the work environment or influence the leader-member relationship. For example, extroverted traits could have impacted the mentality of student employees, therefore moderating the effect of the supervisor's role on job satisfaction. However, despite these limitations, the current findings add unique information to current literature by utilizing a well-established model to better understand job satisfaction. Continued research designed to empirically explore the work-related experiences and factors that contribute to job satisfaction among young adults is warranted.

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Appendix A - Leader-Member Exchange Scale

1. Do you know where you stand with him/her…do you usually know how satisfied he/she is with what you do?

    a. Rarely

    b. Occasionally

    c. Sometimes

    d. Fairly often

    e. Very often

2. How well does he/she understand your job problems and needs?

    a. Not a bit

     b.   A little

     c.   A fair amount

     d.   Quite a bit

     e.   A great deal

3. How well does he/she recognize your potential?

     a.   Not at all

     b.   A little

     c.   Moderately

     d.   Mostly

     e.   Fully

4. Regardless of how much formal authority he/she has built into his/her position, what are the chances that he/she would use his/her power to help you solve your problems in your work?

     a.   None

     b.   Small

     c.   Moderate

     d.   High

     e.   Very high

5. I have enough confidence in him/her that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present do so?

     a.   Strongly disagree

     b.   Disagree

     c. Neutral

     d. Agree

     e. Strongly disagree

6. How would you characterize your working relationship with him/her?

     a. Extremely ineffective

     b. Worse than average

     c. Average

     d. Better than average

     e. Extremely effective

Appendix B – Transformational Leadership Questionnaire

1= Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

Integrity:

1. My supervisor shows determination on the job.

2. My supervisor does not display honesty. (R)

3. My supervisor is approachable.

4. My supervisor considers the ethical implications of actions.

5. My supervisor expresses values shared by program staff members.

6. My supervisor encourages staff behaviors consistent with the values shared by all members.

7. My supervisor acts consistently with values shared by program staff members.

8. My supervisor keeps commitments.

9. My supervisor is trustworthy.

10. My supervisor behaves in ways that strengthens respect from staff members.

11. My supervisor is someone that staff members are proud to be associated with.

12. My supervisor models behaviors other staff are asked to perform.

13. My supervisor shows self-confidence.

Demonstrates Innovation

14. My supervisor positively acknowledges creative solutions to problems.

15. My supervisor encourages ideas other than own.

16. My supervisor is respectful in handling staff member mistakes.

17. My supervisor encourages staff to try new ways to accomplish their work.

18. My supervisor suggests new ways of getting tasks completed.

19. My supervisor asks questions that stimulate staff members to consider ways to improve their work performance.

20. My supervisor does not criticize program members' ideas even when different from own.

Inspirational Motivation

21. My supervisor communicates program needs.

22. My supervisor identifies program weaknesses.

23. My supervisor considers staff needs when setting new program goals.

24. My supervisor displays enthusiasm about pursuing program goals.

25. My supervisor obtains staff assistance in reaching program goals.

Develops Others

26. My supervisor offers individual learning opportunities to staff members for professional growth.

27. My supervisor takes into account individual abilities when teaching staff members.

28. My supervisor coaches staff members on an individual basis.

29. My supervisor recognizes individual staff members' needs and desires.

30. My supervisor assists individual staff members in developing their strengths.

Supports others

31. My supervisor treats staff members as individuals, rather than as a collective group.

32. My supervisor treats individual staff members with dignity and respect.

33. My supervisor does not respect individual staff members' personal feelings. (R)

Task delegation

34. My supervisor provides opportunities for staff to participate in making decisions that affect the program.

35. My supervisor provides opportunities for staff members to take primary responsibility over tasks.

36. My supervisor delegates tasks that provide encouragement to staff members.

37. My supervisor delegates tasks that build up the organization.

Appendix C – Job Satisfaction (Self-Generated for this Study)

1= Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

1. I am happy with my job

2. I like working at my current job

3. I am good at performing the duties associated with my current job

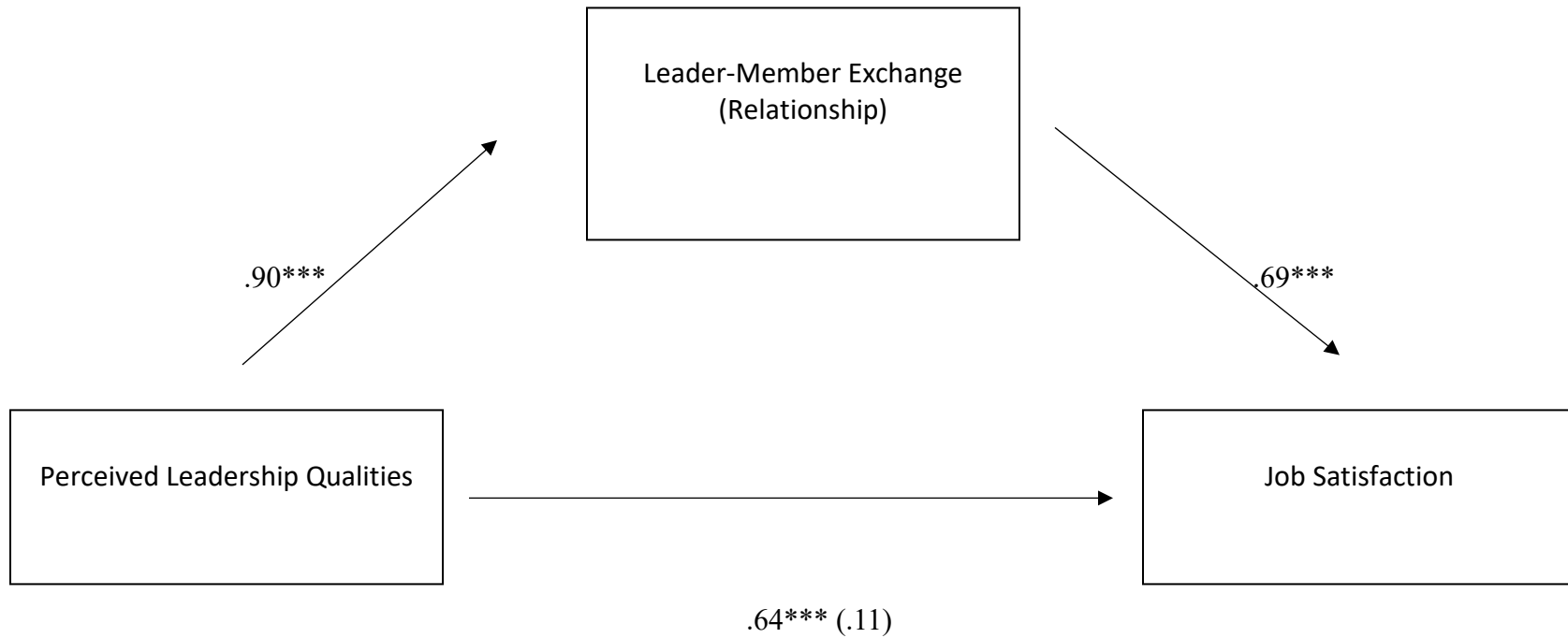4. I feel underutilized at my job" (R)

Figure 1. Standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between perceived leadership qualities and job satisfaction as mediated by leader-member exchange. The standardized regression coefficient between leadership qualities and job satisfaction, controlling for leader-member exchange, is in parentheses.

***p < .001.