

Leader-Member Exchange Quality and employee work behaviours: Mediating Role of Interactional Justice

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the mediating role of interactional justice between LMX quality and employee's in-role behaviour and citizenship behaviour. Adam's equity theory and social exchange theory are employed to explain the theoretical framework. Proposed mediation model is tested using time lagged data of 308 responses from service sector of Pakistan. To examine validity of the measures, confirmatory factor analysis has been done. The measurement model produced better indices for five factors. Structure equation modelling technique has been used to test mediation model. Results supported the hypothesis of mediation. Finally managerial implications and future research directions have been discussed.

Keywords: LMX quality, Interactional Justice, Organization citizenship behaviour (OCB), In-role behavior (IRB)

1. Introduction

Leader-member exchange relationship has been in the focus of OB research for last three decades. Leader-member exchange theory (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976) conceptualizes leadership as a process and its central focus is the interactions between leader and follower. The theory posits that the leader develops a distinct relationship with each member of the work unit through a process known as LMX differentiation (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Leader member relationships or exchanges vary along a continuum from low to high-quality (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

An extensive empirical research reveals that high-quality LMX impacts positively on employee attitudes and behaviours e.g. organizational commitment, job satisfaction, OCB, job performance, and creativity and negatively impacts on turnover intentions and stress (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Erdogan & Liden, 2006; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgenson, 2007; Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

Although LMX theory has produced a flourishing and successful area of research including its antecedents and outcomes and can be extended the understanding of leader-member relationships from further theoretical refinements. However, with some exceptions (e.g., Burers, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008; Cheunga & Wub, 2012), there has been little examination of the underlying processes by which LMX quality effects work outcomes. A better understanding of these processes is needed to maximize leader effectiveness in terms of employee positive work outcomes. For example, It is widely accepted that LMX causes higher subordinate performance and OCB, but it is not yet extensively understood the *how* and *why* of these relationships (Walumbwa, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2011; Chen, et al., 2007).

Perceived interactional justice pertains to perceptions of fairness in the interpersonal treatment of subordinates by their leaders enacting formal procedures (Bies & Shapiro, 1987). It reflects subordinates' feelings of how well they are treated by their superiors with truthfulness, justification, respect, and propriety (Bies & Moag, 1986). Perceived interactional justice may be a critical psychological process that explains the effects of the leader-member exchange quality on subordinates' work behaviours for two reasons. First, perceived interactional justice has been shown to be associated with employees' evaluations of their leaders (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) and have more significant effects on key outcome variables than perceived distributive and procedural justice (Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002). Second, perceived interactional justice has been generalized and validated in multiple cultural contexts including China (Barling & Phillips, 1993; Chiaburu & Lim, 2008; Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997; Kwon, Kim, Kang, & Kim, 2008; Leung, Tong, & Ho, 2004).

A recent meta-analysis on antecedents and outcomes of LMX quality has indicated procedural and distributive justice as outcomes of LMX quality (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2011). Interactional justice was not included due to lack of enough empirical evidences in previous research. But it pointed out a need to investigate how employees perceive interactional justice on the basis of their relationship quality with their leaders. This study aims to investigate the underlying mechanism in terms of interactional justice between LMX quality and employee work behaviours including in-role behaviour and OCB.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses development

2.1 LMX Quality

LMX theory (Graen, 1976) has emerged as the dyadic approach in leadership to explain the relationship between leader and follower. A supervisor/leader and a subordinate/member of organization make a dyad (Graen &

Scandura, 1987). This theory also explains that leaders do not have same level of exchanges with each subordinate but this exchange is different with individual subordinate. The exchange quality is regarded as high where close and informal relationship exists between leader and member but it is called as low quality when leader has a formal relationship with other members. It means that leader-member exchange quality differs member to member.

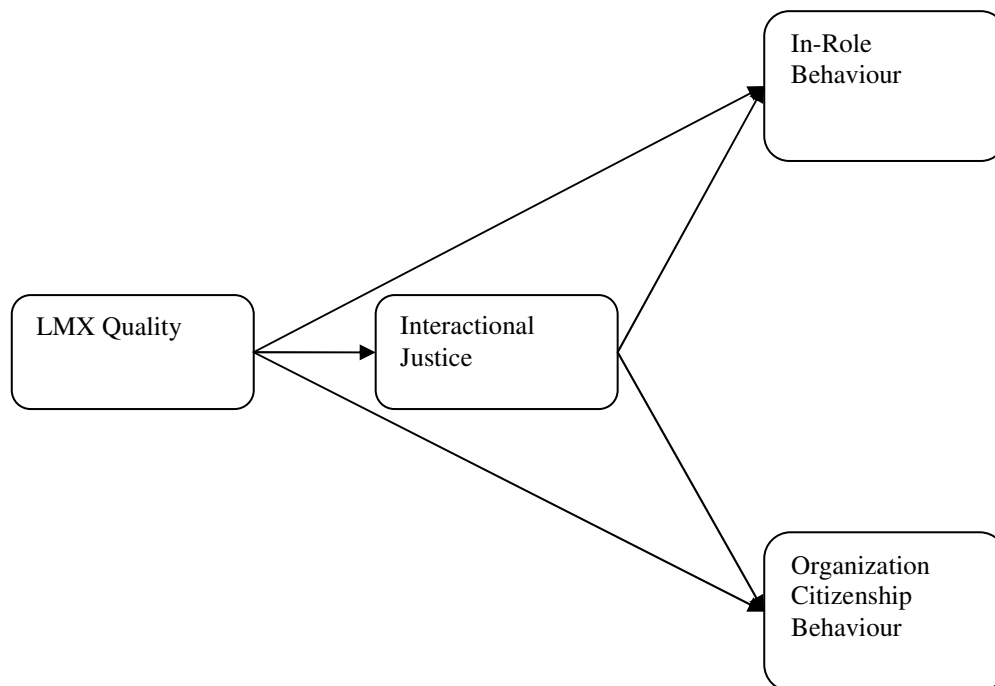


Figure 1 Mediating role of Interactional Justice between LMX quality and employee behaviours

Members who enjoy better or important work roles are called “in-groups” or “cadre” and have high quality leader member exchange relationships distinguished by trust, loyalty, open communication, information sharing and emotional support (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Members who are less trusted and given less important roles are referred as “out-groups” and have low quality exchange relationship with leader and have obligations in their formal contracts only (Liden and Maslyn, 1998).

Research is evident that high LMX quality is very effective for positive work attitudes and behaviours and low quality is detrimental for attitudes and behaviours (Liden & Graen, 1980; Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982) and these reciprocation of high and low quality leader member exchanges are explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958).

A key argument of LMX theory is that high-quality exchanges between leaders and employees have beneficial effects for leaders, employees, and organizations (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993). The theory explains that the positive effects of high quality exchanges occur through the development of social exchange processes (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960).

2.2 LMX Quality, In-Role Behavior and OCB

Work performance refers to the performance directed toward formal tasks, duties, and responsibilities such as those included in a job description (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) refers to ‘individual behaviours that are discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promote effective functioning of the organization’ (Organ, 1988: 4). These discretionary behaviours are categorized by target i.e., employees and organization called OCB-I and OCB-O (William & Anderson, 1991). Researchers have tried to find out the potential causes, situations and conditions when employees show citizenship behaviours (Bhal, 2006). OCB towards individuals and towards organization are very much distinct from other performance measures like in role performance (William & Anderson, 1991). An extensive research explained that high quality of leader member exchange relationship leads to positive attitudes and behaviours for example commitment, job satisfaction, OCB, and job performance (e.g., Scandura & Graen, 1984; Erdogan & Linden, 2002; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgenson, 2007; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997;

Wayne & Green, 1993) and low quality LMX impact negatively in terms of turnover intentions and stress (e.g., Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) explains if employees are trusted and delegated important roles, they reciprocate positively in terms of outcomes.

H1: LMX quality is positively related to In-Role behavior, OCB-I, and OCB-O.

2.3 LMX Quality and Interactional Justice

Perceived interactional justice pertains to perceptions of fairness in the interpersonal treatment of subordinates by their leaders enacting formal procedures (Bies & Shapiro, 1987). It reflects subordinates' feelings of how well they are treated by their superiors with truthfulness, justification, respect, and propriety (Bies & Moag, 1986). A meta-analysis reported a lot of empirical studies indicating its positive relationship with work performance, job satisfaction, supervisor satisfaction, affective commitment, and leader-member exchange quality, and negative relationship with continuance commitment and turnover intentions (Cohen-Charash, & Spector, 2001).

The relationship between LMX quality and organizational justice has been discussed in two perspectives in the research so far. Few studies indicated that LMX quality develops on the basis of perceived justice by the employee (Cropanzano & Byrne, 2000; Erdogan & Liden, 2006). Trust, respect and mutual obligation characterizing high quality exchanges develop through a series of successive satisfactory interactions between leaders and members (Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000). But a recent meta-analysis indicated that LMX Quality leads to Organizational justice due to few strong theoretical justifications (Dulebohn, et al., 2011).

In that meta-analysis procedural and distributive justice have been discussed as consequences of LMX quality but dropped interactional justice due to less availability of this link in previous studies. Previous studies also indicated that perceived interactional justice has been shown to be associated with employees' evaluations of their leaders (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) and have more significant effects on key outcome variables than perceived distributive and procedural justice (Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002).

Same justifications can easily be applied for LMX quality and interactional justice relationship. First, based on the observation that LMX forms relatively quickly (Bauer & Green, 1996; Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993), it is logical and convincing to assume that evaluations of interactional justice occur later in the relationship just like procedural and distributive justice. Second, a review of LMX studies highlighted that previous studies explained procedural and distributive justice as consequence of LMX quality and there is lack of empirical support for interactional justice. Interactional justice can also be studied as consequence of LMX quality because leader member exchange quality means exchange relationships between employee and supervisor that contain multiple interactions. In-groups enjoy more interactions with the supervisor due to more exchanges of trust, obligation, information etc and take benefits out of these exchanges. Therefore employees evaluate the leaders fairer due to close contact and interaction with the leader availing more access to resources, roles and information.

Third, differential justice perceptions resulting from high-quality or low-quality status is supported by equity theory (Adams, 1963) in previous studies (Dulebohn, et al., 2011).

Adams (1963) explains that individuals employ equity principle while evaluating fairness of outcomes whereby they compare their own input-outcome ratios to a referent or comparable other. Individuals perceive fairness when the ratio or balance of their outcomes to their inputs is equal to that of the referent other whereas inequity is perceived when the ratios are unequal. Adams also pointed out the subjectivity of these evaluations and emphasized that evaluations of equity are in the eye of the beholder. That clearly indicated that these evaluations and perceptions of fairness are subjective in nature which is also verified by many researchers (e.g., Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999; Lind & Tyler, 1988).

In light of LMX predictions of differential leader treatment of those in high-quality and low-quality relationships, we expect high-quality LMX relationships will lead to interactional justice just like procedural distributive justice perceptions (Erdogan & Bauer, 2010). In contrast, low-quality LMX relationships may lead to perceptions of injustice in interactions and exchanges. This may occur due to the fact that when evaluating process and outcome fairness (based on equity theory), these followers may view the leader as inconsistent or biased not only in processes and outcome allocations but also in individual interactions and as favouring in-group members rather than themselves. This may be justified in that high-quality relationships are more likely to receive favourable treatment than low-quality relationships, as well as more favourable outcomes because of their status.

H2: LMX Quality is positively related to Interactional Justice.

2.4 Interactional Justice and In-role behavior and OCB

Organizational justice literature suggests that perceived fairness of rewards, decision-making procedures, and interpersonal treatment are related to outcomes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, performance, and citizenship behaviours (Cohen et al., 2001; Colquitt, et al., 2001).

Subordinates who are fairly treated by their supervisors are likely to reciprocate with their citizenship

behavior and task performance in line with the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964).

Meta-analytic evidence from Cohen-Charash and Spector's (2001) suggests that interactional justice is positively related to work performance, job satisfaction, supervisor satisfaction, affective commitment, and leader-member exchange quality, and negatively related to continuance commitment and turnover intentions.

Research on Interactional justice shows a positive relationship with in-role performance and OCB.

H3: Interactional justice is positively related to In-role behavior, OCB-I and OCB-O.

2.5 Mediating Role of Interactional Justice

Leader member exchange is a complex phenomenon consisting of economic and social exchanges draws attention of researchers since long. Due to its enriched mechanism, researchers tried to pay attention on integration of LMX and organizational justice (Hollander, 1978; Scandura, 1999). Few theoretical and empirical studies examined nature of relationship between LMX and distributive and procedural justice but there is lack of investigation on integration of LMX framework with interactional justice (Dulebohn et al, 2011). Walumba et al., (2011) pointed out to investigate mediators between LMX quality and outcomes relationship to better understand the underlying mechanism. Previous section clearly indicated theoretical reasoning for LMX-interactional justice relationship. A central tenant of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is that leaders do not treat each subordinate the same and that LMX quality can range from low to high (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). Social exchange theory is generally used to explain the positive effects of high LMX. Blau (1964) defined social exchange as involving unspecified obligations created by received favours. As leaders initiate social exchanges by bestowing favorable treatment upon certain members (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), members in turn feel obliged to work harder to benefit the leader as a means of reciprocation (Liden et al., 1997). Thus, a key view of LMX theory is that members' work-related attitudes and behaviours depend on how their leaders treat them. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) helps to explain mediating role of interactional justice between LMX quality and employee behaviour at workplace. The in-groups perceive high level of interactional justice due to close interaction with the boss and enjoy more trust, respect and access to opportunities and information. Hence these in-group members reciprocate this high quality exchange relationship and high perceptions on interactional justice in terms of positive work behaviours including in-role behaviour and citizenship behaviours. Whereas out-group members are in a distance to the leader and exchanges are limited to job descriptions only. When these out-group members compare their own interaction with the in-group members' interactions to the leader, they perceive injustice in their interactions and hence reciprocate in terms of low in role and citizenship behaviours.

H4a: Interactional Justice mediates the relationship between LMX quality and In-Role Performance.

H4b: Interactional Justice mediates the relationship between LMX quality and OCB-I.

H4c: Interactional Justice mediates the relationship between LMX quality and OCB-O.

3. Research Design and Methodology

Data is collected from the service sector particularly telecom companies and higher-studies institutions situated in Islamabad and Rawalpindi region of Pakistan. Non probability convenience sampling was employed because it was difficult to know about the whole employees' population working in service sector organizations in the twin cities. A two wave time design has been used to test proposed mediation model as suggested by methodologist. A time lagged data helps to address reverse causality and method biases in the causal studies. A time-lagged data was collected in two tiers using self-administered questionnaire. LMX quality was tapped at time 1, and Interactional justice was measured at time 2 with at least gap of 1 month from time 1. LMX quality and Interactional justice were self-reported by the followers working under the supervision of a boss. In-Role performance and OCB are measured also measured at time 2 but these outcome variables were peer reported. This methodology is really helpful to reduce self reporting bias in the data.

Total of 800 questionnaires were distributed to employees of selected 7 organizations. 570 questionnaires were collected back. At time 2 the questionnaire were distributed to the employees who responded at time 1. Overall 340 questionnaires were received back and matched with time 1 responses using primary key (employee no/ name/ any code generated by employee). But 310 questionnaires were matched with the peer reported data. Finally 308 complete responses were available for analysis after excluding incomplete responses.

3.1 Measures

LMX quality: Seven items developed by Scandura and Graen (1984) were used to measure the quality of LMX. A five-point likert scale was used (1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = strongly agree). A sample item was 'Do you usually feel that you know how satisfied your immediate supervisor is with what you do?' The Cronbach's alpha of the measure for this study was 0.88.

Interactional Justice: to measure interactional justice 9-item scale of Coloquitt et. al., (2001) has been used.

The sample items are: Has communicated details in a timely manner? Has treated you with respect? Alpha reliability was 0.89 for this study.

IRB: A five-item, scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991) was used to measure In-role behaviour. These items were peer reported. The peers were asked to assess their colleague's performance using the scale. A sample items are : this employee adequately completes assignment duties, and this employee Full fills responsibilities specified in job description. The alpha coefficient was 0.83.

OCB: Organizational citizenship behavior was measured using William and Anderson's 14-item scale comprising of two dimensions OCB-Individual and OCB-Organization. Reliability for OCB-I was 0.82 and for OCB-O it was 0.72.

3.2 Sample Demographics

The sample consisted of 39.5 % females and 60.5% males with average age of 34.5 years. Each employee was working with the supervisor for at least last 6 months. 34% of the respondent had Bachelor, 45 % master/MPhil and 21 % had PhD qualification. Average experience with the current organization was 6 years. All respondents were working with their supervisor at least for last 1 year.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The reliability of each variable was found using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all variables and was greater than 0.72. Confirmatory factor analysis was carried out and maximum likelihood estimation method was used to establish reliability and validity of the variables under study. A five factor model produced better results when factor loadings less than 0.4 were excluded to achieve the minimum criteria of 0.50 (Kline, 2005; Shammout et al., 2007). 3 items of In-role behavior and OCB-O each and two items of interactional justice were dropped to improve the model fit indices. CFA results were assessed using multiple fit indices e.g. root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), χ^2/df , goodness of fit index (GFI), and Normal fit Index (NFI). The revised five factor measurement model produced results showing excellent fit to data where RMSEA = .04, $\chi^2/df = 2.3$, CFI= 0.99, NFI = .98, GFI= 0.98, AGFI = 0.96 were reported. Table 1 is showing the factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha and number of items included in the revised measurement model.

Table 2 is showing mean, standard deviation and correlation among all variables under study. All variables were significantly correlated at $p < 0.01$. The strongest correlation was indicated between LMX quality and interactional justice ($r = 0.61$). The correlation between LMX quality and OCB-O was weakest ($r = 0.29$).

Construct	No. Of items	Item	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α
LMX	7	LMX1	.667	0.88
		LMX2	.747	
		LMX3	.698	
		LMX4	.742	
		LMX5	.732	
		LMX6	.715	
		LMX7	.766	
Interactional Justice	7	IJ1	.675	0.89
		IJ2	.698	
		IJ3	.772	
		IJ4	.584	
		IJ5	.662	
		IJ6	.680	
		IJ7	.667	
In-Role Behaviour	4	IRB1	.781	0.83
		IRB2	.786	
		IRB6	.746	
		IRB7	.686	
OCB-I	7	OCB11	.597	0.82
		OCB12	.632	
		OCB13	.628	
		OCB14	.692	
		OCB15	.617	
		OCB16	.412	
		OCB17	.609	
OCB-O	4	OCB01	.769	0.72
		OCB02	.711	
		OCB03	.585	
		OCB04	.497	

Table 1. Factor loadings, and Cronbach's α Reliabilities
N= 308

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	
1. LMX	3.8	0.69	1				
2. Intl Just	3.7	0.61	0.61**	1			
3. IRB	3.4	0.49	0.44**	0.41**	1		
4. OCB-I	3.8	0.64	0.33**	0.27**	0.19*	1	
5. OCB-O	3.6	0.59	0.29**	0.35**	0.47**	0.25**	1

Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlations

Note: *Correlation is significant $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed) $N = 308$

To test the hypothesized mediation model Structure equation modelling was employed. SEM is considered as an authentic technique to measure a mediation model because it solves all the equations in a causal model simultaneously (Chin et al., 2008). Therefore the proposed model was tested using this technique where interactional justice is mediating the relationship between LMX quality and outcomes (In-role behavior, OCB-I and OCB-O). The results of full structural model indicated a significant multiple indices like CMIN/DF (1.92), CFI (0.98), NFI (0.97), GFI (0.97), AGFI (0.95) and RMSEA (0.051) were above or close to the cut-off criteria which indicates that data fit in better way to the proposed model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

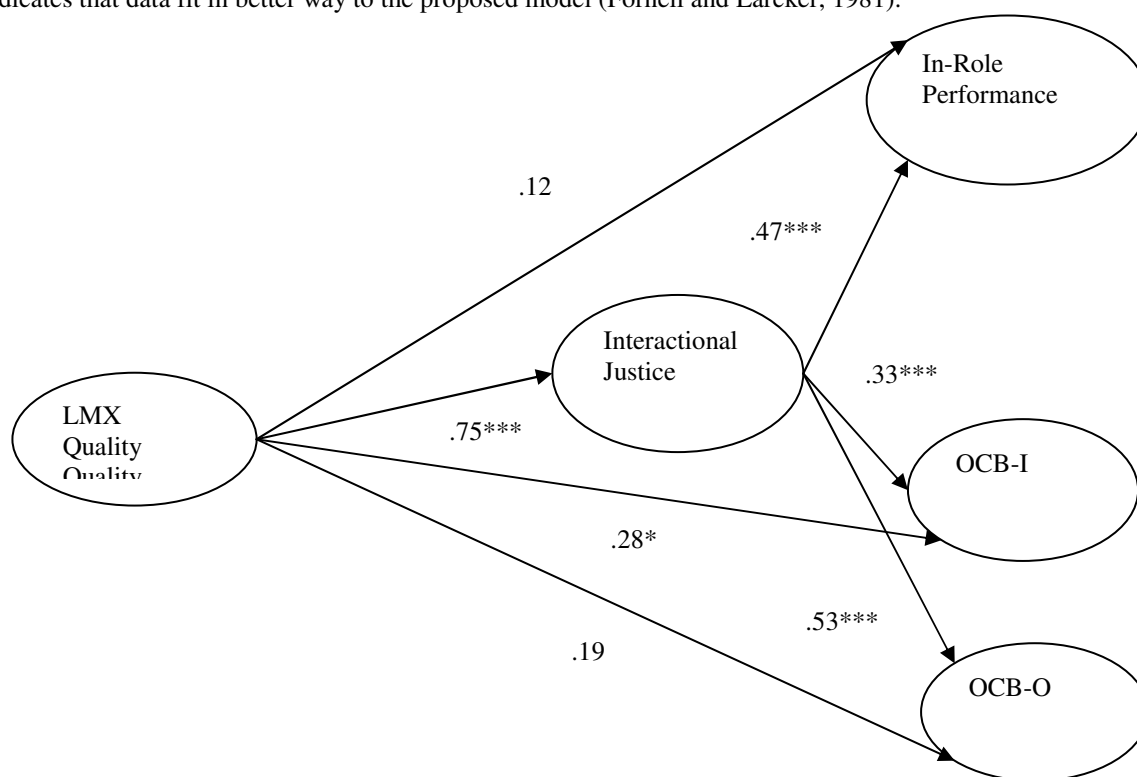


Figure 2 SEM Path Diagram

After getting reasonably good model fit indices, path coefficients also indicated significant results proposed in the model as given in Table 3. According to the results LMX quality has a strong positive impact on interactional justice ($\beta = 0.75$), therefore supporting H4. Interactional justice also have a positive significant impact on In-role behaviour ($\beta = 0.47$), OCB-I ($\beta = 0.33$), and OCB-O ($\beta = 0.53$). these values indicate that H5, H6 and H7 are accepted.

	Proposed Causal Relation	β	p
H1	LMX----> IRB	0.12	.25
H2	LMX ---> OCB-I	0.28	.06
H3	LMX ---> OCB-O	0.19	.12
H4	LMX ---> Intl Justice	0.75	***
H5	Intl Justice --->IRB	0.47	***
H6	Intl Justice --->OCB-I	0.33	0.005
H7	Intl Justice --->OCB-O	0.53	***

Table 3. Standardized regression weights of the paths in the models

Note: *** $p < 0.05$

A standardized path coefficient of > 0.30 reflects a medium effect while a value of $.50$ and above shows a large effect. Standardized beta values greater than 0.30 are required for a meaningful discussion on the results (Chin, 1998). All paths from LMX quality to interactional justice and then from interactional justice to three outcomes have shown significant results with medium to large effect size.

Table 3 is also showing the results for direct paths from LMX quality to IRB, OCB-I and OCB-O. These three direct paths are proved to be insignificant that is showing the proof of proposed mediation hypothesis H8a, b and c. These results are in line with the proposed model and showing full mediation by interactional justice between LMX quality and three outcome variables (IRB, OCB-I and OCB-O).

5. Discussion

The results are quite encouraging got through goodness of fit and standardized betas for the suggested model. However a comparison can be made on the basis of effect sizes. This study provides strong support to the proposed relationship between LMX quality and interactional justice. Out of all path estimates, the largest effect size is observed for LMX quality to interactional justice which validated are theoretical reasoning of this relationship. Interaction justice impact all three outcomes significantly but impact size for OCB-O is largest as compared to the other two coefficients for IRB and OCB-I. It means the mediation of interactional justice was much stronger between LMX quality and OCB as compared to other two indirect paths. Results also proved full mediation because almost all direct paths between LMX quality and outcomes are insignificant. As this study is based on two wave data, therefore reverse causality between LMX quality and interactional justice has also been addressed.

6. Managerial Implications and Limitations

This study provides insights for the managers as well. To establish justice in the organization, it is very important to treat all subordinated equally because subordinates make justice judgment on the basis of interactions with their supervisors. As perception of low justice is detrimental for performance, therefore supervisors need to broaden size of in-groups in the organization. LMX quality has been proved as a strong predictor of interactional justice, therefore leaders should not only have to take care of distributive and procedural justice but they have to be fair in their interactions to the subordinates. This study is based on time lagged data which is highly required for a mediation model and to clearly understand process between LMX quality and employee behaviours through their perception of interactional justice. Despite many strengths of this study there are few limitations as well. This study is based on LMX quality perceived by follower only; it may be more meaningful if LMX perceived by leaders could be measured as well.

This study analysed mediation role of one interactional justice between LMX quality and employee behaviour but few more potential mediators should be studied to enhance understanding on the underlying mechanism.

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