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Influence of Leader-Member Exchange on Teachers' Workplace Outcomes at Vocational Colleges in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the influence of leader-member exchange on teachers' communication satisfaction and turnover intention is examined. A regression analysis shows that the independent variable (leader-member exchange) has a direct and significant effect on the dependent variables (communication satisfaction and turnover intention) in five vocational colleges examined in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The findings confirm previous findings about the impact of workplace relationships on teachers' attitudes and behaviours, especially supervisor-subordinate relationships. The implications of these findings are discussed as they relate to the management of teachers at vocational education institutions in South Africa.

KEYWORDS

Leader-member exchange; supervisor-subordinate relationship; communication satisfaction; turnover intention; workplace relationship

Communication satisfaction and turnover intention are two workplace outcomes that could influence retention of quality teachers at the vocational education level. Retention of teachers is a challenge (Mmako & Schultz, 2016; Nxesi, 2014) because good teachers are leaving to take up well-paid positions in the private sector and other higher education institutions (Mmako & Schultz, 2016) and vocational teachers' jobs are more challenging than are those of academic teachers (Field, Musset, & Álvarez-Galván, 2014). The turnover of vocational teachers is linked to evidence in the literature that deteriorating work conditions such as poor communication increase negative employee workplace outcomes. For example, Engle (2012) observes that teachers have faced the challenges of constant change taking place at technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in South Africa, and these changes increase their stress levels. In addition, the merger of colleges, which constitutes part of the reforms at the vocational education level, has left several grey areas unexplained with respect to teachers' employment conditions in the mega colleges formed, and this has had a bearing on teachers' overall communication satisfaction (Gewer, 2016; Sooklal, 2004). Wedekind and Buthelezi (2016) note that the challenges of poor management-teacher relationships have exposed workplace relationships to problems and caused critical human resource management issues because the shortage of quality teachers has an effect on pedagogic quality. Thus, organised human resource interventions

targeting positive outcomes for existing teachers is required to increase their communication satisfaction and reduce turnover intention.

Studies attest to the importance of effective supervisor-subordinate workplace relationships, particularly because such relationships predict workplace outcomes such as communication satisfaction (Mueller & Lee, 2002), negative turnover intention (Michael, 2014; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2019), and affective commitment (Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, & Shacklock, 2012; Usadolo, 2016). Thus, in the context of this study, it is important to understand the influence of positive supervisor-subordinate workplace relationship. Several studies (see Brunetto et al., 2012; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005) have looked at the impact of supervisor-subordinates' workplace relationships – conceptualised as leader-member exchange (LMX) in this study – on teachers' communication satisfaction and turnover intentions. Consequently, this study provides insights on vocational colleges which is rarely studied in the literature.

The study of turnover intention is essential due to the cost of replacing valued employees (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005), which Allen (2008) notes may be as much as 60% of an employee's annual compensation. Turnover is a consequence of turnover intention, defined as employees feeling that they will leave their organisation within a certain period of time (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007), and it results in the loss of staff with organisational memory, knowledge and firm-specific skills (Allen, 2008). Likewise, communication satisfaction, broadly defined as an individual's satisfaction with various aspects of communication in interpersonal, group, and organisational contexts, is an important workplace outcome in organisations because it demonstrates the positive affective state of employees in relation to their supervisors or organisations, and it is used to judge organisational well-being and functioning (Downs & Adrian, 2004). Gregson (1990) states communication satisfaction has been shown to influence college employees' levels of job satisfaction (Madlock, 2008; Steele & Plenty, 2015) and commitment (Engin & Akgöz, 2013; Madlock, 2012).

Several studies have demonstrated the significant impact of LMX on workplace outcomes, such as communication satisfaction (Mueller & Lee, 2002; Terek, Nikolic, Gligorovic, Glušac, & Tasic, 2015) and turnover intention (DeConinck, 2011; Michael, 2014; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2019). These researchers have examined numerous antecedents of employee communication satisfaction, such as LMX (see Mueller & Lee, 2002), leadership (Terek et al., 2015), and work engagement (Moura, Orgambidez-Ramos, & Gonçalves, 2014), as well as turnover intention (Golden & Veiga, 2008; Usadolo, 2016), but only a few studies have incorporated these variables into more comprehensive models, and none have done so at TVET colleges in South Africa. Thus, it is important to understand the antecedents of both turnover intention and communication satisfaction among teachers at the vocational colleges in South Africa.

The present study seeks to fill a gap in the research by examining the influence of the relationship between teachers and their supervisors, called programme managers, on communication satisfaction and turnover intention at TVET colleges in South Africa. These results are expected to have practical significance; they will help to determine the antecedent of teachers' communication satisfaction and turnover intention at TVET colleges.

In the next section, the independent and dependent variables are discussed to develop applicable hypotheses, followed by method section in which the context of

the study, samples, measures, data collection and design of the study are discussed. The final section contains the analysis, conclusions and implications of the findings.

Leader-member exchange

As detailed below, teaching generally is quite challenging in South Africa (Panday & Arends, 2008) due to, among other things, poor relations between management and teaching members of staff (Dehaloo, 2008). Research has consistently shown that apart from their peers, one of the supports teachers rely on is their school principals (Tatar, 2009) who are their immediate supervisors. Thus, principals are major players in the consideration of supervisor-teacher's relationships and their positive supervisor-subordinate (LMX) communicative exchange can help to reduce turnover intentions of teachers. In sum, LMX may provide an explanation for communication satisfaction and turnover intention among vocational teachers and teachers in general.

LMX is a theory that is focused on the quality of relationships between leaders and followers (Agarwal, Datta, Blake-Beard, & Bhargava, 2012; Erdogan & Enders, 2007). The theory suggests that leaders maintain different kinds of working relationships with subordinates, and leaders' success is affected by the nature of the relationship they develop with each of their subordinates (Graen & Scandura, 1987). When the relationship a leader maintains with subordinates is positive, it is known as a high-quality or positive LMX. Employees in positive LMX relationships are referred to as in-group members and enjoy mutual support, trust and respect; access to information; and opportunities to participate in decision-making, all of which makes it possible for them to deal with work-related challenges (Mueller & Lee, 2002). On the other hand, a poor working relationship or low-quality LMX between the supervisor and subordinates, who are referred to as out-group members, results in poor workplace outcomes such as poor levels of information-sharing and less involvement in decision-making (Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, & Shacklock, 2010), which could lower communication satisfaction and increase turnover intention.

The choice of LMX as an independent variable in this study is based on the fact that, as opposed to several other leadership theories that seek to explain leadership based on the characteristics of leaders or of the situation in which leaders operate in organisations, LMX focuses on two-way or dyadic exchange relations between leaders and followers (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Using LMX as an independent variable in this study allows us to analyse whether the nature of relationship that exists between the teacher and their immediate supervisor (programme manager) can be characterised as high-quality or low-quality. Such characterisation is determined from the analysis of the data and differentiates between teachers who are part of the in-group and out-group. For example, a high-quality LMX would imply that the programme managers and teachers at TVET colleges have healthy interpersonal relationships characterised by respect and fairness. It also means that the teachers enjoy mutual support, trust and respect, participate in decision making, and have access to information, which makes it easier for them to solve work-related problems (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Mueller & Lee, 2002). Other benefits for ingroup teacher members is that they receive bonuses and interesting work assignments and have the prospect of being promoted. In this type of relationship, teachers, as ingroup members, are likely to be loyal and committed to their programme managers (Northouse, 2001).

Using Northouse's (2001) explanation, it means teachers who are in high-quality LMX relationships will have less reason to resign and greater job satisfaction (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Programme managers in high-quality LMX relationships benefit from teacher loyalty, commitment, and knowing that they are leading subordinates whose behaviours and work practices result in the realisation of set work objectives (Basu & Green, 1997).

With high-quality LMX relationships, a flow of information and communication exists between teachers and programme managers, and because teachers receive meaningful feedback, they are empowered to make decisions (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). When this happens, the greatest benefits are delivered to teachers, students, and the school in the form of a sound pedagogical environment. On the other hand, teachers who belong to the outgroup experience the contrasting workplace situation; they lack support from their programme managers because they are not able to work according to the values and standards required to be in the ingroup.

Previous empirical studies, such as those of Eisenberger et al. (2010), have shown that employees are more likely to be committed to achieving the goals of their task, as recommended by their leader, when they are in high-quality LMX relationships. Liao, Hu, and Chung (2009) state that leader-member relations had a significant and positive effect on job satisfaction in a tourist hotel in Taiwan. In short, employees in high-quality relationships with their supervisors have job satisfaction.

The literature also shows that managing employees' psychological well-being is fundamental to organisational success, and this requires, in the context of this study, a programme manager who is able to provide organisational support for teachers to carry out their duties. However, despite an increasing understanding of the role of leadership at supervisor level in providing favourable organisational support, few empirical studies on the role of supervisors and how the exercise of their supervision roles affects employees' communication satisfaction and turnover intention have been conducted. The intention of the study is to examine how the relationship of the programme manager affects teachers' communication satisfaction and turnover intention.

Communication satisfaction

Communication satisfaction in an organisation is the personal satisfaction derived by successfully communicating with an organisational member (Thayer, 1968). It also refers the degree to which communication fulfils employees' requests for information regarding work-related or organisational activities (Putti, Aryee, & Phua, 1990). Employees judge the nature of their relationships with supervisors mainly through the nature of their communicative relationship with their supervisors. Where there is a lack of teacher support and poor resources, which is typical of the teaching profession in South Africa (Dehaloo, 2011; Karp, 2007) teachers' good communicative relationship with their supervisors (principals) recognised by Frese, Beimer, and Schoenborn (2003) as central to how leadership is perceived in the organisation is not possible.

Holladay and Coombs (1993, p. 411) argue that "leadership is enacted through communication in that effective communication shapes the followers' perceptions of a leader". Their assertion shows the link between leadership and communication and that employees' perceptions of their leaders reflect the degree to which they are satisfied

or dissatisfied with their communication with their leaders. This equally applies to how well employees understand the requirements of their jobs and their organisational goals (Downs & Adrian, 2004). Given the fact that teachers job demands extend more than classroom teaching activities, it is likely that they (teachers) will face challenges of understanding the requirements of their jobs. For example, in South Africa, teachers across all tiers of education are designer of learning programmes and materials, leaders, administrators, researchers, assessors, learning area and subject specialists (Republic of South Africa, 2000). Such demands give rise to role ambiguity and role conflict. Thus, it requires a good teacher's supervisor to communicate in such a way that role ambiguity and conflict are minimised or eliminated.

In light of the above, programme managers' communication competence at the TVET colleges examined depends on the effective use of communication to deal with what is important to achieve a stated goal. The extent to which the stated goal is achieved will depend on the cumulative communication satisfaction teachers derive from their interaction with their programme managers. As such, communication satisfaction is a key construct in determining employees' organisational effectiveness (Madlock, 2008; Mueller & Lee, 2002) and it has been confirmed as an antecedent of many workplace outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Madlock, 2008; Steele & Plenty, 2015), organisational commitment (Engin & Akgöz, 2013; Madlock, 2012), and negative turnover intention (Hargie, Tourish, & Wilson, 2002).

Studies have focused on how the nature of communication between organisational leaders, such as the supervisor and his/her subordinates, has resulted in achieving organisational goals and objectives (Mueller & Lee, 2002; Steele & Plenty, 2015). For example, Hopper (2009) found a positive significant relationship for all constructs of communication satisfaction and leadership in the study of a rental organisation in New Zealand. Communication satisfaction, according to Orpen (1997) and Pettit, Goris, and Vaught (1997) has also been found to influence employees' levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and work motivation. Hargie et al. (2002) have shown that when poor communication satisfaction exists, higher levels of absenteeism, increased employee turnover, reduced productivity, and low commitment from employees will ensue. This suggests a strong link between communication satisfaction and workplace outcomes.

However, a limited amount of literature exists that has examined the LMX construct and communication satisfaction in educational organisations, particularly TVET colleges in South Africa, besides Meintjes and Steyn (2006), who used a communication satisfaction questionnaire (CSQ) to measure employees' communication satisfaction in a private higher education institute. The constructs of communication satisfaction will be discussed with their corresponding hypotheses in the sections below.

Communication satisfaction constructs

Eight constructs comprise communication satisfaction. These are feedback, relationship with the supervisor, subordinate communication, horizontal and informal communication, corporate perspective, organisational integration, media quality, and communication climate. In this study, communication satisfaction is considered in terms of two functions, relational communication satisfaction and informational communication satisfaction, because some of the constructs are relational in function while others are

informational in function. The relational dimension of communication satisfaction in this study is focused on satisfaction with the relationships between teachers and their programme managers at the TVET colleges examined. The relational dimension includes media quality, personal feedback, horizontal and informal communication, and relationships with supervisors (Gray & Laidlaw, 2004).

Jalalkamali, Ali, Hyun, and Nikbin (2016) noted that the informational aspect of communication satisfaction is focused on satisfaction with the content of the organisation and the exchange of information. The constructs that are classified as informational communication satisfaction are organisational integration, corporate perspective, and communication climate (Gray & Laidlaw, 2004). The communication satisfaction constructs are discussed below together with their corresponding hypotheses.

Relationship with the supervisor

In this study, relationship with the supervisor indicates teachers' satisfaction with programme manager's communication, or the degree to which programme managers are open to ideas, listen and pay attention, and offer information for solving job-related problems. Eisenberg and Goodall (2004) note supervisors who are in sound relationships with their employees display at least four fundamental communicative characteristics: Openness, supportiveness, motivation, and empowerment. The relationship is also characterised by frequent interactions between supervisors and subordinates, which is considered the first step in developing effective supervisor-subordinate relationships (Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, & Gully, 2003).

The fundamental communicative characteristics of this construct are all elements of high-quality LMX. A teacher who feels satisfied with his/her programme manager is more likely to be satisfied with the communication with his/her programme manager. Thus, **Hypothesis 1a** is that a high-quality LMX relationship will influence teachers' communication satisfaction as it applies to programme manager-teacher relationships at TVET colleges.

Media quality

Media quality refers to teachers' perceptions of communication channels at their colleges. It deals with the usefulness and clarity of information sources; the degree to which meetings are well-organised and written directives are clear and appropriate; and the degree to which college communication channels, such as memos, meetings and newsletters are satisfactory and fit their purpose (Downs & Adrian, 2004). Through the communication channels used, teachers expect to read or receive information relating to their colleges. In most cases, programme managers, as the intermediaries between the top management and teachers, have to explain and contextualise information received through the channels to teachers and are expected to contribute to the information. Teachers who are members of ingroups generally receive the information first and may have the opportunity to ask for clarification or even contribute. Therefore, **Hypotheses 1b** proposes that high-quality LMX will influence teachers' communication satisfaction about media quality at TVET colleges.

Horizontal and informal communication

Horizontal and informal communication, also referred to as co-worker communication, is the degree to which horizontal and informal communication is accurate and free-flowing (Downs & Adrian, 2004). From the perspective of TVET colleges, informal communication may be regarded as an excellent source of information about teachers' problems that helps programme managers deal with teachers' work-related activities successfully (Guffy, Rhoddes, & Rogin, 2005). Informal communication is also referred to as gossip or the grapevine and is useful in interpersonal relationships within an organisation.

Viewed through the LMX lens, it is important that programme managers recognise that information shared among teachers who are friends may have an impact on their work and programme manager-teacher relationships. For example, in high-quality LMX communication, it is expected that horizontal and informal communication would be characterised by collegial relationships. Hence, the argument is that teachers in the high-quality LMX pass important information that has bearing on their work situations to their colleagues. This promotes communication, especially relating to workgroup compatibility. From the foregoing discussion, **Hypothesis 1c** is that high-quality LMX will influence teachers' communication satisfaction as it relates to horizontal and informal communication at TVET colleges.

Organisational integration

Organisational integration includes satisfaction with the information that employees receive about their immediate work environment as related to the requirements of their work, policies and benefits, departmental plans, and personnel news (Chan & Lai, 2017). Communication at the organisational integration level allows programme managers to demonstrate to teachers that they are being treated fairly by providing them with relevant and accurate information about their job requirements (Hopper, 2009). Hopper (2009) observes that a refusal to pass on adequate information related to an employee's job by the supervisor would decrease his/her credibility and teachers' commitment to the organisation.

In the context of LMX theory and in line with Saks (2006) explanation, when teachers believe they are receiving timely and necessary communicative support from their programme managers about their work environments, the likelihood of demonstrating more engagement in their jobs will be high. Thus, **Hypothesis 1d** is that high-quality LMX will influence teachers' communication satisfaction in terms of organisational integration at TVET colleges.

Communication climate

Communication climate reflects how employees evaluate communication at the personal and organisational levels. It refers to the degree to which communication in the organisation motivates and stimulates employees to meet organisational objectives and motivates them to identify with the organisation (Chan & Lai, 2017; Clampitt & Downs, 1993). Jones and James (1979, p. 232) note that communication climate is a broader construct of a psychological

climate, which “includes communicative elements, such as judgments on the receptivity of management to employee communication or the trustworthiness of information being disseminated in the organisation”. The organisational climate that programme managers portray to teachers is attributed to the context or state of affairs at colleges.

The provision of high-quality communication to employees by organisations encourages employees to identify with the organisation’s goals as they would feel they are important members of the organisation (Hopper, 2009). In the context of LMX, the support provided by colleges is actualised or evinced by programme managers who have day-to-day working relationships with teachers. Thus, teachers who do not have high-quality communicative relationships with their programme managers may not feel that the support provided by their colleges is adequate, and this is manifested in their judgement of the communication climate of their colleges. Therefore, **Hypothesis 1e** is that high-quality LMX will influence teachers’ communication satisfaction on the communication climate at TVET colleges.

Corporate perspective

Corporate perspective as a construct of communication satisfaction deals with a wide array of information about the employees’ organisations. It encompasses information about organisational change; the organisation’s financial standing; the organisations’ policies and goals; and government policies (Chan & Lai, 2017; Downs & Adrian, 2004). Using the LMX lens, the corporate perspective is viewed as the extent to which programme managers communicate their colleges’ goals, policies, and directives to teachers. Downs and Adrian (2004) claim that this is an important aspect of the corporate perspective because it relates to the organisation’s ability, through the supervisor, to inform, direct, and identify the organization’s goals to employees.

In an LMX context, the quality of the information sharing about colleges by programme managers may help reduce teachers’ uncertainties (Hopper, 2009) because the quality of job and college-related information helps keep teachers better informed and more committed to the college (Sias, 2005). From the foregoing discussion about the corporate perspective, **Hypothesis 1f** is that high-quality LMX will influence teachers’ communication satisfaction about the corporate perspective at TVET colleges.

Turnover intention

Studies on South African vocational teachers are particularly needed since research has consistently revealed several problem areas that could influence their turnover intention. For example, organisational psychologists and social scientists (see Dehaloo, 2011; Maniram, 2007; Roper, 2007) have referred to teachers’ unsatisfied and poor salaries, heavy workloads, few opportunities for career advancements, and unworkable policies as factors contributing to their exodus from the profession of teaching. Added to this is poor relations between management and teaching members of staff (Dehaloo, 2008).

All of these elements above could result in turnover intention of the teachers. Turnover intention “reflects the subjective probability that an individual will leave his or her organisation within a certain period of time” (Zhao et al., 2007, p. 651). Turnover intention may be due to teachers’ dissatisfaction with their colleges’ inability to fulfil their expectations. The intention to leave is a reflection of the psychological state of the individual concerned, and it has been found to be an important predictor of turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Many studies have used turnover intention as a substitute for actual turnover (Price, 2001), which is a term used to denote a situation of employees leaving their organisations voluntarily or when “employees ... sever their association with the organisation” (Pearson, 1995, p. 405).

Penner (2002) and Taylor, Darcy, Hoyer, and Cuskelly (2006) note that employees’ experiences of their relationships with the organisation and its agents are among those factors that affect how long they will stay with the organisation. Other studies have identified differences between expectations and real experiences, relationships with other staff, working conditions (Schindler-Rainman & Lippitt, 1971), and the job design (Stolte & Myers, 1995) as factors that affect employees’ decisions to stay with or leave organisations.

Turnover intention is usually associated with high rates of absenteeism, finally culminating in turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000). These outcomes are costly to human resources department of organisations in terms of recruitment and training because the loss of teachers who have acquired the relevant knowledge and experience would affect their colleges’ effectiveness and efficiency. Understanding the causes of turnover intentions and how to mitigate them through the nature of the relationship between teachers and their programme managers is therefore important.

The effects of negative relationships between supervisors and subordinates have been empirically supported by the literature. Workplace outcomes such as turnover intentions are high among employees who perceive their relationships with supervisors as being low (Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005; Morrow, Suzuki, Crum, Ruben, & Pautsch, 2005). Teachers’ job satisfaction has been linked to their continuous involvement in their organisations through aspects such as satisfaction with the nature of the leadership they have received (Betancourt-Smith, Inman, & Marlow, 1994).

Wheeler, Gallagher, Brouer, and Sablinski (2007) note that turnover diminishes when employees experience high-quality LMX. This is consistent with Northouse’s (2001) findings, in which lower turnover intentions, greater organisational commitment, and positive job attitudes were related to high-quality LMX. In addition, the quality of LMX was negatively related to turnover intention in the meta-analytical study by Gerstner and Day (1997), while Griffeth et al. (2000) found LMX was negatively related to the actual turnover. Based on the fact that high-quality LMX is characterised by supervisors providing resources that meet both the physical and psychological needs of subordinates, the implication is that expected turnover for teachers at TVET colleges would be low among those who experience high-quality LMX relationships with their programme managers. Thus, **Hypothesis 2** is that high-quality LMX is negatively related to teachers’ turnover intention at TVET colleges (Figure 1).

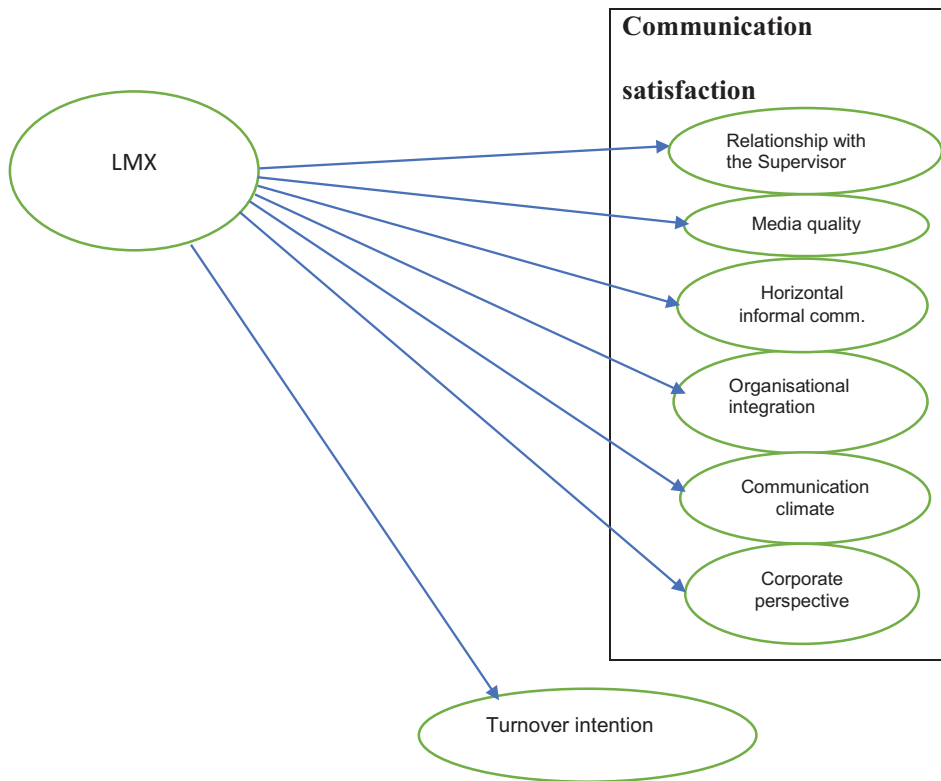


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

Methods

Context of the study

The data analysed in this study were collected from participants on six campuses of five TVET colleges in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The TVET colleges were established due to the South African government emphasis on vocational education for equipping young people with artisan skills not taught at academic institutions such as universities. The government then embarked on far-reaching reforms to merge former technical colleges and place them under the Department of Higher Education and Training DHET (Buthelezi, 2018; Dutschke, 2010). The governing councils in the merged colleges were mandated to recruit academic and non-academic staff as it suited them in terms of the FET Colleges Amendment Act No. 3 of 2012 (Gewer, 2016). This placed the colleges' authority in an uncertain position, resulting in a lack of appropriate response strategies to the reforms and continuous tension within colleges regarding employment conditions (Gewer, 2016). Academic staff turnover escalated based on more rewarding opportunities elsewhere (Wedekind & Buthelezi, 2016).

Further changes that came with the reforms in the TVET colleges were curriculum development and different learning approaches for improving teachers' pedagogical quality in the vocational education system (Paterson, 2016), a responsibility that fell on the academic management to implement in cooperation with teachers. Characterising

the reforms is an emphasis on teachers developing professional competency for the changes required in their students and silence regarding teachers' well-being, work conditions, and workplace relationships.

In these vocational colleges, a typical management structure is campus academic managers, programme managers, and college academic managers. There are other higher management positions such as Vice Programme Manager (Academic) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), also referred to as the Principal. In this study, the main concern is with teachers and their immediate bosses or programme managers. Programme managers have day-to-day relationships with teachers in the form of academic issues; this includes the management of teachers with respect to their major responsibilities of teaching and acting as go-betweens in the college management structure, especially with respect to human resource-related issues. Thus, programme managers play a major role in furthering the dominant organisational policies that influence individual decisions and organisational procedures and practices.

From the foregoing, a case for examining the leadership influence on communication and turnover intention can be made based on the history of TVET colleges. For example, Sooklal (2004) asserts that the merger process was not well communicated and a lack of effective support for the teaching staff resulted in high levels of resistance. In addition, lack of clarity around leadership and lines of accountability during the initial period of the merger restricted decision-making and added to the instability in the colleges (Gewer, 2016). A study by Wedekind and Buthelezi (2016) notes several interpersonal relationship problems between teachers and the management of TVET colleges. It is crucial, therefore, to examine the effects of programme managers' workplace relationship on teachers' workplace outcomes (communication satisfaction and turnover intention) at the TVET colleges. As explained in this section and given the explanation of LMX, the programme managers on the six TVET campuses are regarded as the teachers' (the participants) supervisors.

Participants and procedure

The data were collected through a self-administered survey using a cross-sectional research design, which involved the distribution of questionnaires to 380 participants on six campuses of five TVET colleges in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Although 192 questionnaires were returned, only 187 (94%) questionnaires were included in the analysis because five of the questionnaires were incomplete.

Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, meetings were held with the management of the participating TVET colleges to explain the objectives of the research and request permission for collecting data. Thereafter, the researchers met with teachers and explained to them the importance and objectives of the research. In the meetings, both teachers and programme managers were given the assurance that the information collected would be kept confidential and findings would be reported anonymously. Most of the questionnaires were distributed by hand to teachers and collected by one of the researchers in subsequent meetings.

Measures

Measures used in this study were adapted from previous studies. The respondents were asked to state their level of agreement or disagreement on six-point Likert-type scales ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6).

LMX measurement

The unidimensional LMX-7 instrument for measuring supervisor-subordinate relationships developed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) was adapted for this research. Previous studies, such as those of Gerstner and Day (1997) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) attest to the instrument's high reliability, value, and psychometric properties. An example of a question is, "I have a good working relationship with my supervisor". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in this study was .90.

Communication satisfaction measurement

Communication satisfaction was measured with the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) developed by Downs and Hazen (1977). The CSQ consists of 40 items covering eight constructs. Six constructs from the CSQ were covered using a six-point Likert-type scale. The constructs included were relationship with the supervisor, organisational integration, horizontal and informal communication, communication climate, corporate perspective, and media quality. The constructs removed were subordinate communication and personal feedback because both constructs are required to be completed by those in supervisory or managerial positions. In this study, teachers were assessing their programme managers; hence, the two constructs were deemed irrelevant to this study.

Where the term "supervisor" appeared in the measures adapted, this word was replaced with "programme manager" because the programme manager is considered the supervisor of teachers at TVET colleges. The Cronbach's alpha for each of the variables were relationship with the supervisor .90, organisational integration .94, horizontal and informal communication .97, communication climate .75, corporate perspective 0.90, and media quality .92.

Turnover intention measurement

The organisational turnover intention was measured by four items adapted from Abrams, Ando, and Hinkle (1998). An example of one of the items was, "In the next few months, I intend to leave this organisation". The Cronbach's alpha was .97.

Demographic analysis

Biographical data for participants were analysed using simple descriptive statistics. The number of male participants was 151 (81%) and female participants 36 (19%). The majority were between the ages of 27–46 (75%) and married: 119 (64%). Graduates amounted to 132 (71%), and most participants had been with the organisation for between two and five years were 169 (90%).

Data analysis

A factor analysis was conducted on the 36 questions in the questionnaire with a factor loading of 0.50 as the cut-off point. The results revealed eight latent variables with eigenvalues greater > 1 , which explained 78% of the variance, with the first factor accounting for 12.5% of the variance. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at a Chi-squared value of 5761.954 ($p < .001$), and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above the minimum required value of 0.6. The value was 0.864.

Construct validity, which includes content, convergent, and discriminant validity, was tested to assess the credibility of the measures used, as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) and Kline (2011). It is important to ensure that the items used represent the theoretical construct that they were intended to measure (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Content (face) validity was established by using pre-validated survey instruments. Convergent validity was established by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the items. The average variance values of the scales ranged from 0.65 to 0.78, which are above the minimum recommended value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010; Vinzi, Chin, Henseler, & Wang, 2010). These values provide support for both convergence and discriminant validity: They indicate that all the latent variables were distinct from each other.

A correlation matrix shows that all the variables correlate with each other. Multicollinearity and common-method bias were not a problem because none of the correlations were above 0.90 (Pavlou, Liang, & Xue, 2006). To ascertain the chance of common-method bias, the Harman's one-factor test was performed. The result showed that one factor only explains 24% of the variance. This indicates that common method was not an issue because common-method bias would be a matter of concern only if one factor explains 60–70% of the variance (Fuller, Simmering, Atinc, Atinc, & Babin, 2016). Table 1 shows the correlation coefficients for each variable and the means and standard deviations of all the variables examined in the study.

A simple linear regression was used to test the validity of all the hypotheses because they predicted direct relationships between LMX and communication satisfaction and between LMX and turnover intention.

Results

The regression analyses conducted showed that significant relationships exist between LMX and all the constructs of communication satisfaction except horizontal and informal communication. The results are explained below using the two broader classifications of communication satisfaction: relational and informational communication satisfaction.

A simple linear regression supports the relational communication satisfaction indicated by Hypotheses 1a ($R^2 = .250$, $F = 9.989$, $p < .0001$) and 1b ($R^2 = .131$, $F = 4.503$, $p < .0001$), as predicted, but it did not find support for the horizontal and informal communication aspect of the relational communication satisfaction represented with Hypothesis 1c ($R^2 = .019$, $F = 0.556$, $p > .05$). The results of the analyses are presented in Table 2. Except for horizontal and informal communication, the results show that high-quality LMX is significantly related to teachers' relationships with programme managers and the media quality at the TVET colleges examined.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Matrix.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender	1.19	.40	1												
2. Age	4.35	2.36	.002	1											
3. Marital status	2.30	1.01	-.161*	.049	1										
4. Education	2.86	1.12	-.085	.002	.208**	1									
5. No. of years	2.96	1.22	.137	-.020	.031	.031	1								
6. LMX	4.19	0.88	1.23	.018	-.155*	.058	.030	.030	1						
7. Relationship with the supervisor	4.14	0.85	-.024	-.056	.029	.020	.039	.020	.497**	1					
8. Co. perspective	4.13	1.26	-.097	-.105	-.015	-.016	-.062	.096	.233**	.096	1				
9. Organ. integration	4.23	0.95	-.0135	-.125	.074	.001	-.030	.390**	.361**	.390**	.200**	1			
10. Com. climate	3.49	1.43	.091	-.121	.093	.087	.107	.202**	.202**	.128	.105	.014	1		
11. Horiz. communication	4.64	0.94	.031	-.023	-.001	.079	-.053	-.077	-.077	-.029	-.013	-.105	-.014	1	
12. Media quality	4.85	1.13	.103	.062	.096	.091	-.083	.285**	.285**	-.74	-.114	.056	.163*	.013	1
13. Turnover intention	2.75	1.63	.088	.177*	-.024	-.028	-.133	-.582**	-.582**	-.398**	-.257**	-.274**	-.250**	.035	-.026

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Regression Analysis Detailing the Impact of High-Quality LMX on Relationship with the Supervisor, Media Quality and Horizontal and Informal Communication.

	Relationship with the supervisor	Media quality	Horizontal and informal communication
Gender	-.037	.133	.048
Age	.023	.102	-.037
Marital status	-.014	.080	-.003
Education	.025	.092	.085
No of years	.029	-.113	-.060
LMX	.501**	.298**	-.081
R ²	.250**	.131**	.019
F	9.989**	4.503**	.566

Note. $N = 187$, ** Correlation is significant $< .001$ level. * Correlation is significant $< .005$ level.

A simple linear regression supports the informational communication satisfaction represented by Hypotheses 1d ($R^2 = 0.157$, $F = 5.591$, $p < 0.0001$), 1e ($R^2 = 0.074$, $F = 2.403$, $p < 0.05$) and 1f ($R^2 = 0.080$, $F = 2.613$, $p < 0.05$). The results of the analyses are presented in Table 3. The results show that high-quality LMX is significantly related to organisational integration, communication climate, and corporate perspective at the TVET colleges examined.

A simple linear regression supports turnover intention represented by Hypothesis 2 ($R^2 = .374$, $F = 17.945$, $P < .0001$). The results of the analyses are presented in Table 4. The results show that high-quality LMX is negatively related to turnover intention at the TVET colleges examined.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Detailing the Effect of High-quality LMX on Organisational Integration, Communication Climate and Corporate Perspective.

	Organisational integration	Communication climate	Corporate perspective
Gender	.133	.097	-.101
Age	-.073	-.097	-.069
Marital status	.039	.084	-.037
Education	-.014	.078	-.013
No of years	-.025	.082	-.055
LMX	.350**	.179*	.228*
R ²	.157**	.080*	.074*
F	.591**	2.613*	2.403*

Note. $N = 187$, ** Correlation is significant $< .001$ level. * Correlation is significant $< .005$ level.

Table 4. Regression Analysis Detailing the Relationship between High-quality LMX and Teachers' Turnover Intention.

	B scores	ES B scores	β scores
Gender	.492	.250	.119*
Age	.058	.041	.084
Marital status	.054	.099	.034
Education	-.040	.088	-.028
No of years	-.174	.079	-.131*
LMX	-1.060	.111	-.570**
R ²	.374**		
F	17.945**		

Note: $N = 187$, ** Correlation is significant $< .001$ level. * Correlation is significant $< .005$ level.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to enhance understanding of leaders' influences on workplace outcomes, such as communication satisfaction and turnover intention, among teachers at a vocational education level in South Africa. The influence of LMX on the two workplace outcomes at TVET colleges in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, was examined.

The results revealed a positive link between LMX and the dependent variables, namely, turnover intention and all constructs of communication satisfaction except for horizontal and informal communication. The empirical results with respect to the relationships between LMX and relational communication satisfaction (media quality, relationship with the supervisor, and horizontal and informal communication) provide support for all the hypothesized relationships except horizontal and informal communication. The findings show positive workplace relationships between programme managers and teachers with respect to relational communication satisfaction at the colleges. The findings are a good inference that there is a high-quality LMX communicative environment, in which teachers who are in-group members in their relationship with their programme manager are likely to feel that meetings at the colleges are well-organised; that written directives and reports are clear and concise; and that relationships between teachers and their programme managers are at an acceptable level. The significant relationships between LMX and relational communication satisfaction are important because they confirm that there are high-quality relationships, defined by mutual trust, respect, and acknowledgement and that programme managers at the colleges provide effective communication channels. The findings are consistent with a situation of mutual trust and respect that results in a strong bond between employees and their supervisors (Hopper, 2009; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002).

One of the constructs of the relational communication satisfaction is the relationship with the supervisor. Given the findings about relationships with programme managers, the implication is that teachers believe that they are trusted and valued and that their programme managers offer job-related guidance; hence, programme managers are considered supportive. Evidence suggests that having a supportive supervisor who communicates is significantly related to higher levels of job satisfaction (Rauktis & Koeske, 1994) and this happens in a relationship with ingroup members in a high-quality LMX relationship.

Since past research has already established a significant positive relationship between the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships and workplace outcomes (Gerstner & Day, 1997), it seemed likely that high-quality LMX relationships between programme managers and teachers at the colleges examined would result in positive workplace outcomes. While this expectation was confirmed in the study, the results did not support the informal and horizontal communication construct of relational communication satisfaction.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that informal and horizontal communication channels are not actively promoted at the colleges examined. The use of information technology applications, such as group-ware, e-mail, scheduled meetings, and scheduled video-conferencing has the potential to result in healthy, frequent communication in organisations (Akkirman & Harris, 2005), but these means of communication technologies reduce the traditional face-to-face informal and horizontal communication. The informal

and horizontal communication construct of relational communication satisfaction might have been understood by teachers as a traditional face-to-face relationship. Hence, it was not a factor considered important in the programme manager-teacher relationships by teachers. Further research focused on variables that mediate or moderate the relationship between programme managers and teachers' relationships on communication satisfaction should be conducted. This may help to shed light on the centrality, or the lack thereof, of informal and horizontal communication as one of the components of relational communication satisfaction. A qualitative study that permits probing for more nuanced information is suggested.

LMX was significantly related to informational communication satisfaction (organisational integration, corporate perspectives, and communication climate). This finding suggests that when programme managers of colleges ensure a flow of information about personnel news, employee job progress, profits, financial standing, benefits, policies, goals, changes, and achievements and failures, teachers are likely to use this valuable information and display better task performance because they assume they belong to the inner circle or are ingroup members of their programme managers. Furthermore, the positive relationship between LMX and informational communication satisfaction suggests that proper communication channels for addressing conflicts within colleges could enhance teachers' levels of communication and improve workplace outcomes. The findings are particularly important for the colleges examined, given that Downs and Adrian (2004) note that communication satisfaction relating to organisational integration shows that programme managers are giving appropriate forums to teachers to share information on what is happening in their jobs or at their colleges, and this gives teachers in the ingroup relationship a sense of belonging.

The findings are consistent with those of Akkirman and Harris (2005), who found that virtual workers experience a greater degree of communication satisfaction on all measures or constructs examined. Moreover, a study by Terek et al. (2015) showed a statistically significant relationship between the dimensions of leadership and those of communication satisfaction for primary school teachers in Serbia. Meintjes and Steyn (2006) conducted a study at a private higher education in South Africa using the CSQ to measure employees' communication satisfaction. They found that employees are more satisfied with their supervisors for offering guidance in solving job-related problems, trusting them, and being open to their ideas. Mueller and Lee's (2002) study of LMX is consistent with the findings in this study; they found a positive and significant relationship between LMX and communication satisfaction in multiple contexts.

The retention of teachers in South Africa, according to Deacon (2010), is negatively affected by low teacher morale and job satisfaction, among other things. Steele and Plenty (2015) state that turnover takes place when a weak workplace relationship exists between employees and their supervisors. The findings in this study also show that high-quality LMX relationships are significantly related to negative turnover intention at the colleges examined. This means that with high-quality relationships between programme managers and teachers at the colleges, teachers who are ingroup members are not likely to want to quit their jobs. Previous studies' findings are consistent with the findings of this study as several of them have suggested that high-quality LMX results in negative turnover intentions (see Ansari, Hung, & Aafaqi, 2007; Usadolo,

2016; Usadolo & Usadolo, 2019). Elanain's (2014) study states that the quality of LMX perceptions has a significant impact on turnover intention.

In light of the findings reported above, this study contributes to the literature by opening up discussion about the relevance of LMX theory as a factor that could strengthen and influence teacher's communication satisfaction and retention. Given the changes that have occurred at the vocational education level in South Africa and the dissatisfaction among some staff members, it is important to note that the changes have not translated in negative relationship between programme managers and teachers. This may be due to efforts on the part of programme managers at the colleges, but it also demonstrates that lower level management is fundamental to the success of an organisation, especially at a vocational educational level where people who drive reforms for quality education are teachers. Second, the study extends previous research by examining a more comprehensive model of communication satisfaction and turnover intention that incorporates LMX as antecedent. Thirdly, the current study has contributed to knowledge about LMX, communication satisfaction and turnover intention because as far as we are aware this is the first study of its type to be carried out at vocational education level in South Africa.

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings reveal several important implications for organisations' lower-level management, communication at organisational and interpersonal levels, and retention management in the vocational education sector in South Africa. The link between high-quality LMX, teachers' communication satisfaction and negative turnover intentions suggests that supervisors' leadership styles may play an important role in enhancing workplace outcomes. The significant effects of high-quality LMX on both the informational and relational aspects of communication satisfaction and turnover intention have implications for the management of vocational education and across other educational sectors. Specifically, the results suggest that vocational colleges should focus on enhancing programme manager-teacher relationships to increase workplace outcomes, such as communication satisfaction and reduced turnover intention.

The findings suggest it is critical that managers and decision-makers ensure that programme managers are strengthened within the school system to have effective communication relationships with teachers. For example, satisfaction with the communication process enabled by programme managers at the colleges might gradually lead to positive communication patterns, thereby encouraging teachers to complete job-related tasks easily. Therefore, it is important that decision-makers and managers at the colleges recognise that the nature of programme manager relationships with teachers can have an influence on teachers' workplace outcomes.

The findings reported show that concerns about communication satisfaction should be addressed by human resource managers because it is a precursor of other workplace outcomes, such as organisational commitment (Hopper, 2009), employee engagement (Jaupi & Llaci, 2015), and job performance (Lee & Chuang, 1998), among others. This is important in an environment of constant policy tinkering like the South African vocational education system (Deacon, 2010). It would be a good policy decision for management to identify organisational factors (such as LMX) and workplace outcomes

(communication satisfaction) that could help to motivate teachers to achieve their pedagogical objectives. LMX theoretical improvement might be achieved by unrelenting attention to its role in shaping workplace outcomes such as communication satisfaction and turnover intention.

Limitations and recommendations

Some important limitations of the study should be noted. As stated above, high-quality LMX did not predict the informal and horizontal communication aspect of communication satisfaction. Due to the quantitative nature of the study, it was not possible to find out why this was the case. Had this study been conducted as a mixed method study, it would have been possible to probe further to know why the hypothesis was not supported. It is therefore recommended that further research includes a qualitative component that would help to provide a richer and deeper understanding of the results of the present study.

This study was based on five TVET colleges with mainly Black participants. Caution must be exercised when generalising the findings to other colleges in South Africa, especially ones with a significant White population, who although South Africans, are from different socio-economic backgrounds. Socio-economic background may affect the findings. A similar study that straddles different population groups is recommended so that findings can be generalised across all vocational colleges in South Africa.

A strong point of the study is that the factor analysis showed that items loaded strongly onto the 8 factors used in the analysis, and there was good internal reliability of the scales for each of the constructs, as demonstrated by their Cronbach alphas. In addition, that most of the findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers indicates some degree of reliability and validity. Hence, the study warrants consideration in future studies that examine the impact of LMX on communication and turnover intention across different organisational contexts.

Conclusion

Studies on LMX are central to understanding of antecedents of workplace outcomes that result in organisational success. Given the findings of the study, the programme manager role needs to be strengthened as a key strategy for preventing communication dissatisfaction and reducing turnover intention among teachers at TVET colleges in South Africa. The discussion of LMX, communication satisfaction, and turnover intention has given insight into why they are important organisational and behavioural factors for positive workplace relationships at the colleges examined. The discussion of the literature and findings have provided a picture of how lower-level management practices can promote workplace relationships that improve communication satisfaction and discourage turnover. It is therefore important for programme managers and the entire management at TVET colleges to foster an environment in which the achievement of workplace outcomes will be realised.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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