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Reciprocity in Manager-Subordinate Relationships: Components, Configurations, and Outcomes

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Abstract

The present study examines both positive and negative norms of reciprocity in managerial work relationships by assessing three components of reciprocal behavior: immediacy, equivalence, and interest motive. The findings show that subordinate reports of immediacy, equivalence, and self-interest were negatively associated, and mutual-interest was positively associated, with relationship quality as reported by both subordinates and managers (other-interest was not significant). These components of reciprocity were also subjected to cluster analysis to identify groupings of reciprocity styles. The results indicate styles reflecting high quality ($n = 65$), low quality ($n = 120$), and negative social exchanges ($n = 23$). Analyses addressing reciprocity configurations and work outcomes showed that the higher quality exchange relationships had higher levels of perceived organizational support and altruism (but not commitment) than the lower and negative exchange groups, while only the negative reciprocity group showed lower levels of performance and conscientiousness as rated by the manager.

Since the early groundbreaking work on reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Levi-Strauss, 1957; Malinowski, 1922; Simmel, 1950) a vast number of studies have been conducted examining reciprocity in a variety of fields, showing strong support for the role of reciprocity in relationship development and maintenance. Although the diversity of applications clearly demonstrates that reciprocity is well recognized in the academic literature, seemingly little empirical work has been conducted on reciprocity in manager-subordinate relationships (Set-

toon, Bennett & Liden, 1996; Sparrowe, 1998). This is surprising given the importance of reciprocity within managerial relationships (Liden, Sparrowe & Wayne, 1997; Rousseau, 1998; Uhl-Bien, Graen & Scandura, 2000). As noted by Liden *et al.* (1997) in reference to Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory: "it is remarkable how few studies have directly examined exchange processes between leaders and members given the theoretical centrality of social exchange processes in the formation of LMX relationships" (p. 75).

The present study addresses this gap by investigating subordinate perceptions of reciprocity in manager-subordinate work relationships. Using classic reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Malinowski, 1922; Sahlin, 1972) and Leader-Member Exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991, 1995; Liden *et al.*, 1997; Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2000) literatures, we develop hypotheses examining reciprocity in manager-subordinate relationships and how it relates to outcomes, considering both positive and negative norms of reciprocity. First we examine components of reciprocity individually to see how they relate to dyad members' perceptions of relationship quality. We then examine the reciprocity components in combination, using a configurational approach (Meyer, Tsui, & Hinings, 1993). Configurations are identified using cluster analysis, and then examined relative to important organizational outcomes.

Reciprocity in Manager-Subordinate Work Relationships

Reciprocity addresses the processes governing social interaction among individuals, the "pattern of exchange through which the mutual dependence of people, brought about by the division of labor, is realized" (Gouldner, 1960: 169-170). Its importance to social systems is reflected in descriptions of reciprocity as "the vital principle of society" (Thurnwald, 1932: 106) and a "key intervening variable through which shared social rules are enabled to yield social stability" (Gouldner, 1960: 161). According to Gouldner (1960), the fundamental principles of reciprocity lie in the imbedded obligations created by exchanges of benefits or favors among individuals. This concept, which he termed the 'generalized norm of reciprocity,' evokes obligations toward others on the basis of past behaviors: "... when one party benefits another, an obligation is generated. The recipient is now *indebted* to the donor, and he remains so until he repays" (1960: 174). This norm serves as a stabilizing function as well as a "starting mechanism" in that it helps initiate social interaction and create social structure in the form of status duties (Gouldner, 1960).

Gouldner (1960) notes that the norm of reciprocity can be understood by examining different elements or components of the process, including *equivalence* (the extent to which the amount of return is roughly equivalent to what was received), *immediacy* (the time period between receipt of an exchange and repayment, when commitments have been made creating an obligation yet to be fulfilled), and *interest* (the motive of the dyad partner in making the exchange, *e.g.*, self-interest, mutual-interest, and other-interest). In combination, these elements of reciprocity are said to provide the mechanisms through which the stability of social systems is maintained (Homans, 1958; Liden *et al.*, 1997; Simmel, 1950; Thurnwald, 1932).

Gouldner (1960) also raised the question of whether there exists a negative norm of reciprocity, or "sentiments of retaliation where the emphasis is placed

not on the return of benefits but on the return of injuries" (p. 172). According to Gouldner (1960), historically the most important form of "homeomorphic" reciprocity, or that in which exchanges are concretely alike with respect to things exchanged or circumstances in which they are exchanged, is found in negative norms of reciprocity. From a sociological perspective, a negative norm of reciprocity represents the means by which individuals act against wrongs, and functions to keep balance in social systems. Considering both positive and negative norms, therefore, captures the range of reciprocity that occurs in social exchanges.

In the literature on managerial relationships, Liden *et al.* (1997) propose that positive and negative norms of reciprocity in manager-subordinate exchanges operate along a continuum, ranging from negative reciprocity (where there may be an exchange of injuries), to balanced reciprocity (a positive norm which includes low and high quality LMX relationships), to generalized reciprocity (the most positively developed form of reciprocity). Moreover, they suggest that negative reciprocity is not low quality LMX, which is typically described as void of trust, respect, and loyalty, but rather lies outside traditional conceptualizations of LMX relationships. According to Liden *et al.* (1997), research is needed to investigate both positive and negative norms of reciprocity in work relationships. To address these issues, we examine next how equivalence, immediacy, and interest function relative to positive and negative reciprocity norms in managerial relationships.

Positive Norms of Reciprocity in Managerial Relationships

As described earlier, a positive norm of reciprocity involves indebtedness that results from exchanges among individuals (Gouldner, 1960). In contrast to negative reciprocity, which involves an exchange of injuries, positive reciprocity norms involve an exchange of benefits, with some relationships involving greater exchange of benefits than others. The characteristics of this indebtedness will vary from relationship to relationship, depending on the functioning of the basic elements of reciprocity, including equivalence, immediacy, and interest.

Equivalence. Equivalence is the extent to which the amount of return is roughly equivalent to what has been received. According to Malinowski (1922), reciprocity is an exchange of equivalent services that in the long run balance, benefiting both sides equally. Similarly, Homans (1958) suggested "a certain proportionality between the values to others of the behavior a man gives them and the value to him of the behavior they give him" (pp. 599–600).

The issue of equivalence in managerial exchanges has been discussed in the LMX literature. According to Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2000), as relationships mature from lower to higher quality, individuals move out of "active testing" processes of reciprocity, *i.e.*, they cease keeping score and worrying about whether they are paid back and focus instead on mutual concerns without concern for equivalent or immediate payback. Similarly, Liden *et al.* (1997; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997; Sparrowe, 1998) predicted that the amount of equivalence in managerial exchanges would vary with relationship quality. Specifically, they proposed that higher quality relationships will have lower equivalence, such that what is exchanged is of greater or lesser value than what was originally received. Lower quality relationships will have higher equivalence in which the item(s) exchanged are of approximately equal value. In other words, individuals who trust and respect one

another and are committed to the relationship will not be concerned about making sure that their exchanges are of equal value to remain "in balance" in terms of reciprocity, while individuals in lower quality exchanges will watch to make sure that what they receive back is equivalent relative to what they gave. Therefore, we can hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1a: Manager-subordinate relationship quality (*i.e.*, LMX) will be negatively related to equivalence.

Immediacy. A second element in the reciprocity literature involves the amount of *time between exchanges*. Gouldner (1960) described this as the period when there is an obligation still to be performed, when obligations that have been incurred by an exchange are yet to be fulfilled. Malinowski (1922), in investigating tribal groups, observed that gifts are not immediately returned, and repayment may take as long as a year. Mauss (1950) also discussed gift exchanges as indeterminate in time noting that while reciprocation cannot wait forever, gifts should also not be reciprocated immediately.

Sahlins (1972) used the term immediacy to describe the amount of time between the receipt of material or non-material goods from an exchange partner and when reciprocation occurs. This term, also adopted by Sparrowe and Liden (1997) for their model of managerial work relationships, involves time periods ranging from instantaneous (*i.e.*, high immediacy) to an indefinite amount of time (*i.e.*, low immediacy). Similar to the arguments for equivalence, Sparrowe and Liden (1997) argued that as relationship quality improves, immediacy will move from higher to lower, with individuals becoming more trusting and less concerned with when an exchange is reciprocated.

This is also consistent with Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1991, 1995) time span of reciprocity, where early in managerial relationship development, the time span of reciprocity will be shorter. As individuals begin to build trust in one another more, the time span of reciprocation becomes longer. By the time the relationship reaches high quality, concern about time span of reciprocation becomes much less important.

Hypothesis 1b: Manager-subordinate relationship quality (*i.e.*, LMX) will be negatively related to immediacy.

Interest. A third component of reciprocity involves the interest motive of the dyad partners (Liden *et al.*, 1997; Sahlins, 1972). According to Liden *et al.* (1997), as relationship quality increases, interest will move from a focus on self-interest to a focus on mutual-interest, where the two parties of the exchange strive to obtain mutual benefits. In the highest quality relationships, the interest focus is on other member of the relationship, reflected by an unselfish devotion and deep concern for the other. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991, 1995) agree with this conceptualization, but limit the range the interest motive can take in reciprocal relationships as extending from self-interest to mutual-interest. According to these authors, the highest level of relationship quality would be characterized by a high level of mutual-interest in which each party acts in the best interests of the relationship.

While Liden *et al.* (1997) suggested that other-interest based relationships would occur, they also noted they would be relatively rare in leader-member

work relationships. Since the focus of this research is on manager-subordinate dyads operating in business relationships, we believe that we will not find a pure other-interest focus in higher quality relationships. Similar to the dual-concern model discussed in the leadership and conflict management literatures where concern for one party's interests are not necessarily mutually exclusive of a concern for the other party's interests (Blake & Mouton, 1964), we propose that individuals can engage in reciprocal relationships with more than one motive. That is, individuals can be both self-interested and mutually interested or mutually interested and other-interested. Therefore, if an other-interest motive is found in work-based relationships, we believe that individuals will have other-interest but it will exist in combination with mutual concern (Batson, 1993).

Hypothesis 1c: Manager-subordinate relationship quality (*i.e.*, LMX) will be negatively related to self-interest and positively related to mutual- and other-interest.

Reciprocity Components Combined

While examination of each of the reciprocity components individually is important, to provide a complete picture of reciprocity in work relationships, we need to also examine the components in combination (Liden *et al.*, 1997). We are aware of only one study that has been conducted in this way. Sparrowe (1998) collected data using scenarios reflecting three different levels of reciprocity, with descriptions consistent with the alignments of the reciprocity continuum modeled by Sparrowe and Liden (1997). In so doing, he adopted a configurational approach—combining the equivalence, immediacy and interest components to create a whole representation of reciprocal behavior. Partial support for his hypotheses was found, with the relationship between reciprocity and informal social structure most evident near the ends of the reciprocity continuum but less so at the center.

Though this conceptualization of reciprocity is a step forward in understanding leader- member relationships, Sparrowe's (1998) methodology presupposed that each form of reciprocity consists of the matching level of immediacy, equivalence and interest depicted in the model. We do not know, however, whether configurations of reciprocity styles will naturally form according to this model or another model. Therefore, we also examine whether patterns of immediacy, equivalence and interest, when allowed to combine themselves, will support the predictions proposed above.

Drawing from both Liden *et al.* (1997) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991, 1995), we propose that alignments of reciprocity will form for different types of manager-subordinate exchanges as predicted below (*e.g.*, lower quality and higher quality reciprocity styles).

Hypothesis 2a: Reciprocity in higher quality manager-subordinate relationships will be characterized by low immediacy, low equivalence, and high mutual- and other-interest (and low self-interest).

Hypothesis 2b: Reciprocity in lower quality manager-subordinate relationships will be characterized by high immediacy, high equivalence, and high self-interest (and low mutual- and other-interest).

Negative Norms of Reciprocity in Managerial Relationships

In addition to positive norms of reciprocity, it is possible that negative norms of reciprocity may exist in manager-subordinate exchanges. As mentioned earlier, Liden *et al.* (1997) proposed a more negative relationship than currently captured by out-group exchanges. Uhl-Bien *et al.* (2000) also raised the possibility of negative or dysfunctional leader-member relationships in which "members would display disrespect, severely restrained communication, lack of understanding or even misunderstanding of the other, non-supportiveness, and no commitment to one another or the relationship (*i.e.*, at moderate levels this would be a competitor; at extreme levels, an enemy)" (p. 150).

Evidence of the possibility of negative reciprocity in managerial relationships can be found in the work on abusive supervision. This work, which evolved from earlier related constructs such as petty tyranny (Ashforth, 1997), inconsiderate or coercive behavior (Bies, 2000), non-physical workplace aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1997), and deviant organizational behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), describes abusive supervision as "the sustained display of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000: 178). These behaviors reflect indifference, willed hostility, and oftentimes deviance (Tepper, 2000). While not discussed in terms of reciprocity, it follows that if managers are involved in providing negative behaviors to subordinates, subordinates are likely to exchange negative behaviors in return (hence negative reciprocity, Gouldner, 1960).

Relative to the reciprocity components, these relationships would obviously consist of higher self-interest as opposed to mutual-or other-interest (Liden *et al.*, 1997). Moreover, while the literature suggests that negative reciprocity would be characterized by high equivalence (Gouldner, 1960; Liden *et al.*, 1997), we believe that this prediction may not be appropriate for managerial relationships due to the nature of power/status differences inherent in these relationships. In particular, high equivalence would mean that when a manager provides an abusive behavior, the subordinate would reciprocate in turn with an abusive behavior. Interestingly, however, the literature on abusive supervision does not suggest this to be the case. Rather, abusive relationships are said to provide stress to subordinates, in part because of the helplessness they feel in not being able to respond due to fear of additional negative consequences (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 1998; Keashly, Trott, & McLean, 1994; Tepper, 2000). In particular, Ashforth (1997) found that abusive supervisory behavior was positively related to frustration, stress, reactance, helplessness, and work alienation, and negatively related to leader endorsement, self-esteem, work unit cohesiveness, and performance for subordinates.

Therefore, we suggest that a negative norm of reciprocity may exist in some manager-subordinate relationships. Given the harmful nature of these types of relationships, we do not expect them to be commonplace; however, we could expect that some will be found. These relationships would be characterized by an exchange of injuries, and the interest motive would be self-interest (versus mutual-or other-interested). Moreover, due to power differentials in managerial relationships, we do not expect these to have high equivalence or immediacy, since subordinates are restricted in the amount of negative exchanges they can make with managers without being fired. Based on this, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3: Negative reciprocity in manager-subordinate relationships will be characterized by exchange of injuries, self-interest, low mutual-and other-interest, and low equivalence and immediacy.

Reciprocity and Outcomes

Finally, using the discussion above, we can also examine how types of reciprocity in manager-subordinate relationships will relate to organizational outcomes. When considered relative to the types of outcomes being discussed, *e.g.*, job performance versus attitudinal, a component that may prove influential in identifying patterns of associations between reciprocity and outcomes is interest motive, or the extent to which reciprocity is driven by self-interest versus mutual- or other-interest. Organ (1990) argues it is unreasonable to expect that individuals will intentionally engage in behaviors that compromise their own self-interests—such as purposefully reducing their individual performance records. Such behavior would affect their employability in the future and cause intrinsic pain from deliberately producing shoddy workmanship. Rather than engaging in behaviors that reflect negatively on performance, he argues that individuals will retain a self-interest focus and continue to engage in behaviors that personally benefit them, such as performance.

We believe that for employees in lower quality relationships (note—not negative reciprocity) this self-interest focus will also apply to being conscientious about performing job duties, since this is directly related to managers' assessments of job performance. In other words, we could expect that concern for self-interest by subordinates in lower quality relationships means they will not differ from subordinates in higher quality relationships on outcomes directly related to their performance records, such as performance and conscientiousness (Organ, 1990). If individuals are not fully committed or are dissatisfied, however, Organ (1990) suggests that what they will withdraw are positive discretionary behaviors, such as those that benefit others or the organization, *e.g.*, altruism. Oftentimes such a focus is accompanied by the feeling that the organization is not as supportive as they would like (Settoon *et al.*, 1996). Therefore, we could also expect that individuals in lower quality relationships characterized by self-interest will be significantly lower on work attitudes, such as commitment and perceived organizational support (POS), and helping behaviors than individuals in higher quality exchanges with a mutual-interest focus, which would be accompanied by greater concern for others and discretionary behaviors. This would be consistent with research showing that individuals react best in terms of job attitudes when they work under a combination of economic and social exchanges (Tsui, Pearce, Porter & Tripoli, 1997). Although we do not make a prediction about a non-significant relationship, we also suggest that subordinates in lower quality relationships will not differ from subordinates in higher quality relationships on performance and conscientiousness.

Hypothesis 4: Subordinates in exchanges characterized by mutually-interested reciprocity will show significantly higher commitment, POS, and altruism than subordinates in exchanges characterized by self-interested reciprocity.

As mentioned earlier, negative reciprocity is defined as embattled relationships characterized by self-interest, sabotage, and hatred, in which each party extracts

the minimum necessary from the other and acts to thwart the other's goals (Liden *et al.*, 1997). Negative reciprocity is highly dysfunctional, leading us to expect that they will be negatively associated with desirable behavioral outcomes (Duffy *et al.*, 1998; Tepper, 2000). In particular, considering the types of relationships described above, we would expect subordinates in relationships characterized by negative reciprocity to have lower performance, conscientiousness, and altruism than those in the other types of relationships (Keashly *et al.*, 1994). We would also expect them to report lower organizational commitment and perceived organizational support than those in lower or higher quality manager-subordinate relationships (Duffy & Ferrier, in press).

Hypothesis 5: Subordinates in manager-subordinate exchanges characterized by negative reciprocity will show significantly lower scores on performance, conscientiousness, organizational commitment, perceived organizational support, and altruism than subordinates in exchanges not characterized by negative reciprocity.

In that this differs somewhat from past research, we believe it provides an important clarification to the LMX literature. We suggest that some of the inconsistency in the findings on performance and LMX (Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984) may be due to lack of distinction between negative reciprocity and lower quality exchange. In other words, consistent with Liden *et al.* (1997) we believe the introduction of negative reciprocity to LMX may help identify truly dysfunctional relationships from lower quality relationships based on positive norms of reciprocity. We also suggest the need for theorizing to distinguish between more non-discretionary performance-related outcomes ("I must do it to maintain my employment") and more discretionary outcomes ("I can choose to withdraw this behavior and still keep my job").

Methods

The study was conducted in a division of a large, international service organization located in the southeastern United States (approximately 1100 employees). A random sample of work units was selected to participate in the study. Employees in these units (including front-line employees, support staff, and managers) completed questionnaires on company time during meetings with one of the researchers. Managers were also asked to complete a separate survey about their employees. Surveys were collected over a two-week period. In some cases, individuals wanted to participate but were not able to attend meetings so they were given questionnaires with an envelope to return it to the researchers. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality was assured.

In total, 36 work groups (25 different managers; 4 managers were responsible for multiple work groups) comprising a range of job responsibilities were surveyed (approximately 25% of the organization). A total of 280 subordinate surveys were completed (approximately 6% of attendees of the meetings declined participation). Six surveys were unusable because employees did not complete them appropriately. In addition, missing identification codes on 16 subordinate surveys (6 missing respondent ID's, 10 missing leader ID's) made them unavail-

able for matched-sample analyses. Managers returned a total of 276 surveys assessing their subordinates. Of these, one did not have a leader identification code, and three were unusable because the managers failed to complete the backside of the survey. This resulted in 232 matched manager-subordinate dyads.

Respondents were primarily male (63.2% were male and 25.7% female, 11.1% did not complete this item) and between the ages of 20 and 35 (21.9% were 25 or younger, 39% between 26 and 35, 21% between 36 and 45, 3.9% between 46 and 55, and 2.3% older than 55; 12% missing this item). Ninety-two percent of respondents worked full-time, with 37.1% holding a bachelor's degree or higher (15.9% high school degree or less, 9.8% associate's degree, 22.6% some college, 29.2% held bachelor's degree, 3.8% some graduate work, and 4.1% held a Master's degree, 14.6% did not respond to this question). The sample was mostly white (67.6%), with 1.6% black, and 7% Hispanic, 3.2% Asian, 1.9% American Indian, and 6% "other" (12.7% blank). The average tenure with the company was 5.55 years ($SD = 5.36$ years), and the average tenure with the supervisor was 10 months ($SD = .87$ years).

Measures

Subordinate reciprocity measures include immediacy, equivalence, self-interest, mutual-interest, other-interest, and TENSE (test of negative social exchange). Subordinate-completed outcome measures include organizational commitment and perceived organizational support. Manager-completed outcome measures include subordinate performance, conscientiousness, and altruism. Relational quality (*i.e.*, LMX) was assessed from both managers and subordinates. To control for effects of dyadic tenure, it was included in the analyses with the outcome measures.

Reciprocity measures. Measures of reciprocity were developed for the present study based on the work of Liden *et al.* (1997) and Sparrowe and Liden (1997), and used a 5-point agree-disagree response scale. Immediacy is a three-item measure assessing the amount of time that transpires between manager-subordinate exchanges and their reciprocation (if my manager and I do favors for one another we want to return them as soon as possible so we do not feel indebted to one another; if my manager and I do a favor for one another, we expect the other to return it right away; when I do something extra for my manager I watch for him/her to pay me back) ($\alpha = .75$). Equivalence is a two-item measure assessing the extent to which the items exchanged between the manager and subordinate are of equal value (low equivalence indicates reciprocation is of greater or lesser value than what was originally received, and high equivalence indicates exchanges of approximately equal value). Items include: when exchanging favors my manager and I pay attention to what we get relative to what was given; we expect each other to give back exactly what was given ($\alpha = .71$).

Interest depicts each partner's motive in the exchange relationship. We chose to represent motive with three separate continuous measures (self, mutual, other) instead of with one continuous assessment of interest. This was done to reflect our belief, consistent with the dual-concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964), that the mutual-interest component of reciprocity does not have to exist independently of either self-interest or concern for other.

Self-interest was assessed with a two-item measure (I have learned to look out for myself in this relationship; my manager looks out for him/herself first) ($\alpha = .79$), other-interest with a three-item measure (I am more concerned that my manager gets what he/she needs than I am about satisfying my own interests; if necessary, I would place my manager's needs above my own; if necessary, my manager would place my needs above his/her own) ($\alpha = .79$), and mutual-interest was assessed with four items (my manager and I try to do what's best for each other; if one of us saw that the other needed something we would do it for the other without being asked; my manager and I look out for one another; my manager and I would do just about anything for the other) ($\alpha = .84$). To assess the independence of the newly developed reciprocity variables, a confirmatory factor analysis of items that comprised immediacy, equivalence, self-, mutual-, and other-interest was performed. This analysis also included LMX. As recommended by Medsker, Williams, and Holahan (1994), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was used to assess the overall fit of this six-factor model. The value for the CFI was .94, indicating acceptable fit; *t*-values for all hypothesized factor loadings were statistically significant.

As suggested by Liden *et al.* (1997), we also used an established measure of TENSE, or Test of Negative Social Exchange (Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991), to capture aspects of negative social exchange. TENSE is an 18-item measure designed to assess hostility, insensitivity, interference, and ridicule in a relationship. The alpha for this measure was .95.

Leader-member relationship quality. Leader-member relationship quality was assessed using the LMX-7 (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The LMX-7 consists of seven items that characterize various aspects of the working relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate, including effectiveness of work relationship, understanding of job problems and needs, recognition of potential, and willingness to support the other ($\alpha = .90$). Managers completed a mirror version of the LMX-7, worded to ask them to think of their relationship with the subordinate ($\alpha = .92$). Sample items include: "how well does this subordinate understand your job problems and needs" and "regardless of the amount of formal authority your employee has, what are the chances that he/she would 'bail you out' at his/her expense."

Attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Attitudinal and behavioral outcomes include organizational commitment, perceived organizational support (POS), performance, conscientiousness, and altruism. The attitudinal variables were assessed by subordinates, and the behavioral variables (performance, conscientiousness, and altruism) were gathered from managers. Organizational commitment (OC) is a 10-item measure based on Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974) ($\alpha = .87$). Items addressed the extent to which the employee cares about the fate of the company, talks up the company as a great place to work, takes pride in the company, and values similarity with the company. POS was adopted from Wayne, Shore and Liden (1997), and is a nine-item measure assessing perceptions of the concern, caring, pride, and consideration the company has for the individual ($\alpha = .93$). Both OC and POS were assessed using a 5-point agree/disagree scale. Performance is a six-item measure adopted from Graen, Novak, and Sommerkamp (1982), asking the manager to assess the subordinate's dependability, alertness, planning, know-how and judgment, overall present performance, and

expected future performance, on a 5-point scale from unsatisfactory to outstanding ($\alpha = .94$). Finally, altruism and conscientiousness were adopted from Niehoff and Moorman (1993). Altruism is a four-item measure asking managers to indicate the extent to which they agree (5-point scale) with the statements that the subordinate helps others who have heavy work loads, helps others who have been absent, helps orient new people, and helps those who have work problems ($\alpha = .92$). Conscientiousness consisted of four items asking managers to evaluate subordinates on punctuality, obeying rules, and not taking long or extra breaks ($\alpha = .90$).

Analysis

Regression analysis, controlling for demographic variables, was used to test Hypotheses 1a-1c, which predicted relationships between reciprocity components and relationship quality. These analyses used both subordinate-and manager-reported LMX as dependent variables.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 address the formation of reciprocity configurations (*e.g.*, clusters). For this, reciprocity components and TENSE were subjected to k-means cluster analysis in SPSS (using 208 of the 232 dyads for which we had responses for all 32 items of these measures). The result of this analysis is a listing of cluster centers that allow us to identify how clusters formed on reciprocity behaviors. This procedure is similar to factor analysis except that the groupings are of individuals using different reciprocity components. Examinations of cluster centers identify whether the clusters aligned as hypothesized. Once the clusters were formed, external validity was determined by examining clusters relative to both manager- and subordinate-reported LMX in planned contrasts (ANOVA). If the reciprocity groups capture varying relational quality, we would expect them to be differentially associated with LMX.

The cluster analysis approach is critical to the current test because it lets the data determine the appropriate configurations of reciprocity rather than the researcher structuring the components (*cf.* Sparrowe, 1998); it also allows the reciprocity measures to be considered in combination (consistent with the theoretical propositions) rather than individually. Letting the data determine configurations, however, also creates the possibility of over-describing the sample. Therefore, an independent data collection was undertaken to evaluate replicability of the cluster solutions. To the extent that the independent second sample replicates the initial sample, a degree of validation is provided for the cluster analysis result. The sample for the second data collection consisted of 110 MBA students enrolled in classes at a university in the southeastern United States (survey completed during class time). These students were from multiple organizations and primarily worked full-time (77% full-time), had an average age of 28.6 years, and an average tenure with the supervisor of 23.0 months ($SD = 23.9$ months). Males made up 57.4% of the sample.

Finally, we used MANCOVA to test Hypotheses 4 and 5 concerning reciprocity styles and organizational outcomes. Dyadic tenure was included in these analyses as a covariate. Because cluster analysis produces imbalanced group sizes, these comparisons used the Scheffe method, which is applicable to groups of unequal size and relatively insensitive to departures from normality and homogeneity of variance. Further, it is considered to be conservative compared to other post-hoc methods such as the Tukey HSD and Newman-Keuls (Hays, 1988).

Results

Variable means and intercorrelations are reported in Table 1. Examination of this table shows that both subordinate and manager reports of relationship quality (LMX) are significantly correlated with each of the proposed reciprocity components in the hypothesized directions. Specifically, LMX is negatively related to immediacy, equivalence, and self-interest, and positively related to mutual-and other-interest.

Table 2 reports the results of the regression analysis tests of Hypotheses 1a-1c. Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported; manager-subordinate relationship quality was negatively related to both equivalence and immediacy. These results were replicated when manager-reported LMX was used as the measure of relationship quality. Hypothesis 1c, predicting that relationship quality would be negatively associated with respondent's self-interest and positively associated with mutual and other-interest was partially supported. Self-interest and mutual-interest were significant in the expected directions but other-interest was not significantly associated with relationship quality. Using manager-reported LMX, mutual-interest was again significant, but self-interest and other-interest were not.

Patterns of Reciprocity

The use of k-means cluster analysis specifying a three-cluster solution produced the final cluster centers shown in Table 3. Hypothesis 2a predicted that subordinates in higher quality exchanges would be characterized by low immediacy, low equivalence, and mutual-and other-interest. In the initial sample, indi-

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of variables *a,b,c*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Immediacy	2.07	.77												
2. Equivalence	2.30	.80	.69											
3. Self-interest	2.69	.96	.43	.53										
4. Mutual-interest	3.66	.72	-.39	-.41	-.52									
5. Other-interest	3.21	.81	-.26	-.27	-.39	.57								
6. TENSE	1.39	.58	.21	.12	.32	-.43	-.29							
7. LMX-7	3.75	.77	-.38	-.32	-.53	.68	.47	-.45						
8. Manager LMX	3.73	.74	-.20	-.29	-.32	.33	.22	-.13	.44					
9. Organizational commitment	3.65	.81	-.14	-.17	-.23	.36	.32	-.16	.33	.09				
10. Perceived organizational support	3.11	.89	-.21	-.18	-.30	.41	.34	-.21	.40	.15	.62			
11. Performance	4.18	.72	-.14	-.20	-.21	.31	.13	-.21	.36	.70	.06	.14		
12. Altruism	4.07	.76	-.16	-.23	-.24	.28	.25	-.06	.34	.69	.15	.21	.77	
13. Conscientiousness	4.07	.82	-.15	-.13	-.24	.31	.18	-.17	.29	.60	.16	.22	.79	.82

a Means and standard deviations are based on a 5-point scale.

b Pairwise *N* ranges from 201 to 269.

c All correlations $\geq .14$ are significant at $p < .05$. All correlations $\geq .18$ are significant at $p < .01$.

Table 2. Regression of subordinate and manager reports of LMX on components of reciprocity

	LMX	MLMX	LMX	MLMX	LMX	MLMX
Age	.05	.31**	.06	.28**	.04	.31**
Education	-.03	.08	-.03	.06	.01	.10
Gender	-.04	.09	-.03	.09	-.07	.09
Dyadic tenure	.07	.28**	.04	.25**	.00	.25**
Immediacy	-.40**	-.14*				
Equivalence			-.34**	-.18*		
Self-interest					-.23**	-.09
Mutual-interest					.52**	.21*
Other-interest					.09	.03
F (df)	8.93**	10.77**	5.53**	9.39**	32.33**	9.93**
	(5, 201)	(5, 168)	(5, 183)	(5, 158)	(7, 182)	(7, 152)
R ²	.18	.24	.13	.23	.55	.31

Notes: Gender was coded 1 = male, 2 = female. MLMX is manager-reported LMX.

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

viduals in cluster 3 seemed to fit this prediction well. In cluster 3, immediacy and equivalence were .92 and 1.04 SD below the mean, respectively, and mutual-interest was .91 and other-interest .69 SD above the mean, with self-interest low (.92 SD below the mean) (TENSE was also below the mean). Sixty-five respondents were in this group. Therefore, cluster 3 appears to represent the individuals in the highest quality relationships, and the reciprocity styles of this group were consistent with Hypothesis 1.

Lower quality exchange relationships were predicted to have high immediacy and equivalence, and self-interest (with low mutual-and other-interest). Cluster 2 showed a pattern suggestive of this form of reciprocity. Immediacy (.44 SD above mean) and equivalence (.53 SD above mean) were generally high, and self-interest was positive (.30 SD above the mean). Moreover, TENSE (.19 SD below mean) was in the expected direction. The cluster also showed lower than average mutual-interest (.23 SD below mean) and other-interest (.25 SD below mean). Interestingly, the components of reciprocity were all around or within .50 SD from the

Table 3. Final cluster centers for three-cluster solution

Cluster	1 ($n = 23$)	2 ($n = 120$)	3 ($n = 65$)
Immediacy	.37	.44	-.92
Equivalence	.07	.53	-1.04
Self-interest	1.00	.30	-.92
Mutual-interest	-1.42	-.25	.91
Other-interest	-.75	-.31	.69
TENSE	2.22	-.19	-.37

1. To ease interpretation, the clusters are presented in an order consistent with the reciprocity continuum. Cluster 1 represents negative reciprocity, cluster 2 represents reciprocity in lower quality exchanges, and cluster 3 represents reciprocity in higher quality exchanges.

2. All means are reported using z-scores.

3. The sample for this analysis consisted of 208 of the 232 dyads for which there were responses to all 32 items constituting the variables.

mean, suggesting that though there was some variation and all in the predicted direction, reciprocity in this cluster was approximately average. This shows support for the hypothesis concerning lower quality exchanges (Hypothesis 2b), but also suggests that this group was mostly average on all reciprocity components but slightly toward the negative end on self-interest. The largest number of individuals ($n = 120$) were classified as members of this group.

Hypothesis 3 addressed negative reciprocity, and was hypothesized to be represented by high TENSE (hostility, insensitivity, ridicule, and interference), high self-interest, negative mutual-and other-interest, and low immediacy and equivalence. Cluster 1 appeared to fit the prediction for negative reciprocity relatively well. Cluster 1 showed very high TENSE (2.22 SD above mean), high self-interest (1.00 SD above mean), well below average mutual-interest (1.42 SD below mean), and low other-interest (.75 SD below mean). Rather than low, immediacy (.37 SD above mean) and equivalence (.07 SD above mean) were generally average for the sample. Twenty-three respondents were in this group. This suggests general support for Hypothesis 3.

To ensure confidence in our findings and to explore whether other-interest would emerge as a determinant of a cluster group, we tested an alternative model by specifying a four-cluster solution. Three of the clusters approximated the negative, lower quality, and higher quality configurations found with the three-cluster solution. The fourth cluster did not, however, reflect a group represented by other-interest, but instead a group characterized by an extremely negative or antagonistic relationship, with TENSE at 4.9 SD above the mean and mutual and other-interest each more than 1.0 SD below the mean. This cluster was comprised of only 4 of 208 individuals. Additionally, a two-cluster solution was evaluated as an alternative more parsimonious model. The two clusters approximated higher and lower quality relationships, but in essence were simply mirror images of one another with little variation from the average levels (scores ranged from .69 SD above the mean to .66 SD below the mean). The clusters were also nearly evenly split in membership: 101 in cluster 1 and 107 in cluster 2. As such, it seems the two-cluster solution did not allow enough discrimination to generate a useful set of configurations.

An analysis of the validation sample indicated that the patterns among the reciprocity components were remarkably similar (see Figure 1), lending support to the generalizability of the configurations of reciprocity components. Moreover, the tests of two-and four-cluster solutions in the validation sample mirrored those reported above. Interestingly, the relative numbers of individuals in each category of reciprocity varied from the initial to the validation sample. In the sample of MBA students from multiple organizations the negative group constituted 36.9% of the sample. Together, these results suggest that the three styles of reciprocity are generalizable, yet may consist of different proportions of individuals based on the population sampled. These results and the tests of alternative models lend confidence to both the appropriateness of the three-cluster solution and the lack of a group of individuals who would be classified as engaged in a manager-subordinate relationship based on generalized, or other-interest, reciprocity.

To see how these clusters relate to traditional measures of higher and lower quality relationships and to support our identification of the clusters as negative, lower, and higher quality exchanges, a one-way ANOVA was performed specifying planned contrasts between each pair of clusters using manager-and subor-

Figure 1. Cluster profiles for the samples of organization employees and MBA students.

Figure 1. (Continued).

dinate-reported LMX. The omnibus tests for each of these was significant (LMX: $F(2,199) = 75.01, p < .001$; manager LMX: $F(2,172) = 16.03, p < .001$), indicating significant differences between the three clusters on LMX. Comparison of these contrast showed that for subordinate-reported LMX each group was significantly different in the expected direction: cluster 3 (higher quality exchanges) (mean = 4.35) was higher than cluster 2 (lower quality exchanges) (mean = 3.59) which was higher than cluster 1 (negative reciprocity) (mean = 2.71) on LMX. For manager-reported LMX, the contrasts with cluster 3 (higher quality) (mean = 4.10) relative to clusters 2 (lower quality) (mean = 3.55) and 1 (negative) (mean = 3.35) were also significant, but interestingly, managers made no significant distinction between subordinates who engaged in negative (cluster 1) (mean = 3.35) and lower quality (cluster 2) (mean = 3.55) forms of reciprocity. This finding is consistent with the suggestion that while one may wish to reciprocate negative events or injuries, an employee's individual's ability or willingness to behave in a negative reciprocal manner toward the manager may be squelched.

Reciprocity and Outcomes

Hypothesis 4 predicted that subordinates in relationships characterized by mutually-interested reciprocity would show significantly higher commitment, POS, and altruism than subordinates in relationships characterized by self-interested reciprocity (and that subordinates in lower quality relationships will not differ from subordinates in higher quality relationships on performance and conscien-

Table 4. Results of MANCOVA univariate tests for organizational outcomes by cluster membership

Dependent variable	Cluster number of case	Cluster mean	Cluster comparisons (differences)	Mean difference
Altruism (manager report)	1	3.55	1-2	.33*
	2	3.88	2-3	.40*
	3	4.28	1-3	.73**
Perceived organizational support (subordinate report)	1	2.66	1-2	.44*
	2	3.10	2-3	.39*
	3	3.49	1-3	.83**
Organizational commitment (subordinate report)	1	3.33	1-2	.24
	2	3.57	2-3	.30
	3	3.87	1-3	.54*
Conscientiousness (manager report)	1	3.27	1-2	.70**
	2	3.97	2-3	.28
	3	4.25	1-3	.98**
Performance (manager report)	1	3.47	1-2	.67**
	2	4.14	2-3	.26
	3	4.40	1-3	.93**

1. Cluster 1 represents negative reciprocity, cluster 2 represents reciprocity in lower quality exchanges, and cluster 3 represents reciprocity in higher quality exchanges.

2. Means and standard deviations are based on a 5-point scale.

3. Items in bold indicate a significant mean difference (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$).

tiousness). Again, the findings confirmed this hypothesis, with the exception of the commitment variable. Specifically, cluster 3, which had the highest reports of mutual-interest and other-interest (clusters 1 and 2 were below average on both mutual-and other-interest), was significantly higher than the other groups on altruism and POS. However, cluster 3 was only higher than cluster 1 (negative reciprocity) on commitment. Performance and conscientiousness showed an opposite pattern. Managers did not rate individuals engaged in higher or lower quality reciprocity significantly different from one another, but did rate both groups significantly higher than the negative group on performance and conscientiousness. This is consistent with findings by Duarte, Goodson, and Klich (1994) who found that managers generally rated subordinates in high and lower quality LMX relationships similarly on performance. However, it does raise interesting questions relative to how managers see the varying quality of relationships among subordinates. Moreover, the different findings from past research for commitment suggest that reciprocity may capture a slightly different perspective from LMX.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that subordinates in the negative reciprocity group would have significantly lower scores on all outcome measures than the other groups. The results support the hypothesis. As shown in Table 4, the negative group (cluster 1) was significantly lower than clusters 2 (lower quality exchange) and 3 (higher quality exchange) on all variables, with the exception of the difference between the negative and the lower quality group on commitment.

Discussion

The present study examines both positive and negative norms of reciprocity in managerial work relationships. The findings show that subordinate reports of immediacy, equivalence, and self-interest were negatively associated, and mutual-interest was positively associated, with relationship quality as reported by both subordinates and managers (other-interest was not significant). Moreover, findings addressing reciprocity configurations and work outcomes showed that the highest level exchange relationships had more positive POS and altruism, but not commitment, than the lower and negative exchange groups, while only the negative reciprocity group showed lower levels of performance and conscientiousness as rated by the manager.

This research provides a substantial contribution because reciprocity as a basis for identifying differences in manager-subordinate relationship quality is empirically demonstrated for the first time in the organizational leadership literature. The investigation provides strong empirical validation for the theoretical underpinnings of leader-member exchange theory, while considering LMX as a positive norm of reciprocity. Examination of reciprocity components indicates that interest may serve as a key-defining variable in identifying relational quality. Moreover, other-interest did not emerge as a unique distinguishing characteristic of relationships at the positive end of the continuum as proposed by Liden *et al.* (1997), suggesting that in organizational settings, individuals maintain some focus on themselves even in the highest quality relationships.

The emergence of a cluster representing negative reciprocity introduces the concept of negative reciprocity norms (Gouldner, 1960) to the study of managerial relationships, while bringing together literatures on reciprocity, LMX, and abusive supervision. These findings may add a piece to the puzzle of the association of relationship quality with performance. In the past, some studies have found that LMX is positively correlated with performance (Graen *et al.*, 1982) while other studies have not fully supported this relationship (Vecchio & Gobdel, 1984). Our findings suggest that by not distinguishing between lower LMX and negative exchange, past research may have been confounding the effects of lower and negative reciprocity on performance. In other words, the inability of the current LMX-7 scale to "tease out" negative reciprocity may mean that the positive associations between LMX and performance may be due in part to the "bottom tail" of the distribution, *i.e.*, the relationships that are based on negative reciprocity. Perhaps the lack of findings in some samples between LMX and performance are due to the non-existence of negative reciprocity in these samples (we found membership of 11.1% and 36.9% for the negative reciprocity group in the two samples of this study). For example, some organizations may not tolerate negative relationships and handle them through HR procedures such as termination or reassignment, while some managers may not have developed these kinds of relationships at all. Since the test of this is beyond the scope of the current study, we suggest that future research examine whether the mixed findings of LMX and performance may be due in part to the existence or non-existence of negative reciprocity in the leader-member dyads sampled.

The findings have important practical implications. Whether lower or higher quality exchanges would be acceptable depends on the type of outcome. If the outcome of interest is performance or conscientiousness, the results indicate

that higher quality exchanges are not significantly higher than lower quality exchanges. This may be due to a self-protection focus of the subordinate in these types of exchanges, which causes them to continue to produce at acceptable levels for protection of their own self-interest, such as continued employment (Organ, 1990), and is consistent with findings of Duarte *et al.* (1994). If, however, the desired outcome is more attitudinal or discretionary (e.g., POS and altruism), relationships with higher quality exchange may be preferable. These relationships were significantly higher on POS and altruism. This may be due to the existence of a mutual-interest motive in the higher quality relationships. Employees who are satisfied with the relationship may be more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and helping behavior (Organ, 1990). Since development of the higher quality exchanges require a great investment of time and energy, the results suggest that managers' and subordinates' decisions to invest this time should be considered relative to the need for performance or the need for more discretionary, or attitudinal, types of behaviors.

A key benefit of the analytical approach used in this study is that it allows relational styles to form themselves based on multiple measures of reciprocity considered in combination, and then investigates these styles using information obtained from both members of the dyad. This allows for holistic synthesis, in which analysis of the entire social entity (reciprocity style), not its constituent parts (e.g., each reciprocity component separately), is required (Meyer *et al.*, 1993). This is a necessary condition for proper understanding of reciprocity according to Liden *et al.* (1997). LMX research has been criticized in the past because it has used a single measure of relationship quality without consideration of the critical component of social exchange (Liden *et al.*, 1997; Rousseau, 1998). As a result, some have questioned what LMX is as assessed by the single measure (Dansereau *et al.*, 1995) and whether it really represents the relational dimensions the theory says it does (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The present research suggests that the LMX measure alone appears sufficient in distinguishing between lower and higher quality relationships, but not in separating out negative reciprocity. We offer our approach to reciprocity as a tool for examining leadership relationships, not to replace, but to augment existing measures, and suggest that addition of interest measures (self-, mutual-, and other-) may provide some interesting insight into characteristics of work relationships. Despite this, future research is needed to validate these findings on other samples and with different analytic strategies.

The study had several key strengths over past research. By studying reciprocity we were able, for the first time, to conduct an in-depth exploration of perceptions of the exchange in leader-member exchange. The fact that the patterns of reciprocity behaviors are consistent with LMX theorizing supports the validity of the findings. Associating the cluster solutions with other measures of relationship quality (LMX) also provided validity. Moreover, the use of responses from both managers and subordinates alleviated concerns associated with same-source data.

Despite this, the study did have limitations. The data were cross-sectional, which did not allow for testing of relationship development. A longitudinal design would provide additional opportunities to confirm our results. Similarly, manager assessments of reciprocity would allow for the opportunity to further confirm the findings, and to identify any differences in how managers perceive reciprocity the relationship. We suggest this for future research, as well as studies examining reciprocity across a variety of settings and organizational levels,

and considering the influence of context and content of transactions (e.g., task request versus pay request). Also, while using the TENSE (test of negative social exchange) (Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991) allowed us to assess behavior that is consistent with those associated with negative reciprocity, it does not directly measure this behavior in terms of a reaction to another's behavior. We suggest that future research consider the degree to which the negative exchanges are in retaliation for what another person has done. Finally, we recognize that our conclusions about outcomes are based only on the relative positions of the outcomes and not on any absolute standard or criteria for any of these outcome variables. Therefore, we recommend that future investigations further explore the association of desired amounts of outcomes relative to the reciprocity configurations.

The present study takes a solid step toward remedying problems in past research on managerial relationships that ignored reciprocity. Before we can draw stronger conclusions we need further investigation of these issues. The strong findings in support of LMX theory in the current study, however, suggest that theoretical propositions are on track and that LMX research, and relational leadership theory in general, continue to provide a healthy area for future research in organizational behavior.

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