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LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE AND UNETHICAL PRO-ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR: A MODERATED MEDIATION MODEL

ABSTRACT

Purpose: In this study, drawing on social learning theory, a moderated mediation model was tested. This model examines organizational identification as the mediator and employee unethical tolerance as the moderator in relationships between leader-member exchange (LMX) and unethical pro-organizational behaviors (UPB).

Methodology: The research sample is comprised of 432 full-time employees of a private company operating in the service sector in Turkey.

Results: Consistent with the theoretical model, analysis results indicate that organizational identification mediated a positive relationship between LMX and UPB. Furthermore, results supported the moderated mediation model and showed that an indirect effect of LMX on UPB through organizational identification is stronger when EUT is high rather than low.

Conclusion: This study contributes to LMX and UPB literature by integrating research on organizational identification and employee unethical tolerance.

Keywords: Leader-member exchange, organizational identification, employee unethical tolerance, unethical pro-organizational behavior

1. Introduction

Unethical behaviors in organizations (e.g., fraud in accounting records, false or deceptive sales practices, violation of fair labor standards and human rights) have been the basis for many corporate scandals (e.g., the Enron scandal, the Volkswagen diesel emissions scandal, the Kobe Steel scandal)

that are well-known to the public (Greenbaum et al., 2018; Treviño & Brown, 2005). These scandals have caused many billion-dollar companies to go bankrupt (e.g., Enron) or to suffer major losses (e.g., the Volkswagen case) (Umphress et al., 2010). While some of these scandals took place as a result of employees behaving unethically in their own interests

or to the detriment of the organization (Treviño et al., 2014), some of them are due to UPB (Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Chen et al., 2016).

Researchers who examined the relationship between leadership and ethical behavior have supported the fact that leaders have an impact on ethical behavior of employees (Treviño et al., 1999; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Greenbaum et al., 2018). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), individuals learn almost all their behaviors by observing, imitating, and finding role models (Bandura, 1971). Considering that employees see their managers as role models for the way they behave within the organization (Treviño & Brown, 2005), it is likely that employees with high-quality LMX will model unethical behaviors of their managers (Brown & Treviño, 2014). Employees may find it suitable for their own interest to imitate unethical behaviors of their managers (Greenbaum et al., 2018) because they receive more spiritual (e.g., social support, control, trust) and financial (e.g., decision-making autonomy, promotion, monetary support) resources through high-quality LMX (Tangirala et al., 2007).

According to Ashforth & Mael (1989), “people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories, such as organizational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age cohort” (p. 20). Workers in organizations may have different levels and types of identities. This study focuses on organizational identification in which individuals define themselves according to their membership in a particular organization. Organizational identification occurs when individuals use the defining characteristics of the organization to define themselves. Because employees perceived supervisors as an agent of the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2010), LMX should influence employees’ identification with their organizations (Zhao et al., 2019). Previous studies (e.g., Riketta, 2005) have found that organizational identification is an important determinant of employee attitudes and behaviors towards the organization. From this point of view, organizational identification may be a potential mediator between LMX and UPB.

Furthermore, previous studies (e.g., Effelsberg et al., 2014; Greenbaum et al., 2018) show that employees with high-quality LMX are more likely to take their managers as a role model as to how they should behave and tolerate unethical practices within the

organization. In this study, it is asserted that when employees overlook unethical business practices (i.e., they have a high level of unethical tolerance) with high-quality LMX, they are more likely to model themselves on their managers (Greenbaum et al., 2018), and that these employees are more likely to engage in UPB in comparison to those with low-quality LMX and low-level unethical tolerance.

The study aims to make some theoretical and practical contributions to the literature. First, drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), this study claims that LMX is an important determinant of employees’ UPB. Previous studies have covered the effects of leadership on unethical behavior more within the scope of ethical leadership (e.g., Miao et al., 2019). Furthermore, very few studies have examined the effects of different types of leadership (transformational leadership, authentic leadership) on UPB (Effelsberg et al., 2014). In general, previous studies have found that employees ignore the direct impact of their exchange with managers on UPB, and to the best of my knowledge, no previous study has created a model which includes LMX, organizational identification, EUT and UPB together. Therefore, the findings of the current study are expected to help better understand previous studies on the relationship between leadership and UPB. Secondly, the findings of this study contribute to the discussion of whether high-quality LMX is always advantageous to organizations (e.g., Greenbaum et al., 2018; Bryant & Merritt, 2021). This study predicted that compared to employees with low-quality LMX, employees who have high-quality LMX are more likely to observe their managers and model themselves on their UPB. In line with this prediction, the study predicted that the positive effects of high-quality LMX can be reversed by role modeling of negative behavior causing behavior that is harmful to the organization. Third, the study predicted that organizational identification mediated the relationship between LMX and UPB. Thus, this study contributes to previous research (e.g., Treviño & Brown, 2004; Bryant & Merritt, 2021) on how LMX affects UPB by expanding on them. Finally, the study contributes to the literature on organizational ethics (Froelich & Kottke, 1991; Umphress et al., 2010) by predicting that EUT serves as an important boundary condition for the indirect effect of LMX on UPB. Thus, by expanding the organizational ethics literature, the study gives information about when and how EUT affects employees’ UPB.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 LMX and UPB

The concept of LMX was explained by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) with a relationship-based approach. The relationship-based approach focuses on a dual relationship between the leader and the follower. According to the Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995), the leader does not interact with all of their followers in the same quality due to limited time and resources (Dansereau et al., 1975). By having high-quality exchange relationships with some followers referred to as in-group members, the leader gives them more resources, responsibility, support and rewards beyond their formal contracts (Scandura, 1999). High-quality exchange relationships between the leader and their followers are based on mutual trust and support (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008), interpersonal attraction (Dansereau et al., 1975), and loyalty (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). On the other hand, the leader gives standard resources, responsibilities and rewards within the framework of official contracts to out-group members with whom they have lower-quality exchanges (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Umphress & Bingham (2011) define UPB as “actions that are intended to promote the effective functioning of the organization or its members (e.g., leaders) and violate core societal values, mores, laws, or standards of proper conduct” (p. 622). They indicated that UPB is comprised of two elements. While the first element refers to presenting unethical behaviors such as violating hypernorms, the second element includes pro-organizational behaviors carried out for the benefit of the organization (Umphress et al., 2010; Umphress & Bingham, 2011). UPB has emerged as a special type of unethical behavior that has attracted the attention of organizational behavior researchers in recent years. However, in practice, UPB can be ignored, accepted, or encouraged by organizations because of its benefits to organizations. Studies have revealed that UPB will undermine the long-term interests of the organization and that certain structures generally thought to be beneficial to the organization, such as ethical leadership and transformational leadership, may encourage UPB under certain circumstances (Effelsberg et al., 2014; Miao et al., 2019).

Since leaders are important antecedents of employee attitudes and behaviors (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012), they can help their employees establish

“correct” standards of behavior in their organizations. Leaders have an important role in setting ethical standards in the organization, because they have the power to reward and punish employees to reinforce appropriate normative behavior (Treviño et al., 2000). Therefore, when employees observe their leaders engaging in unethical behaviors, they tend to think that they should do the same in an organizational context and cognitively convince themselves that such behavior is ethical (Zhang et al., 2018). Brown & Mitchell (2010) argued that the basis of unethical leadership questions whether leadership behavior encourages unethical behaviors or whether it is the source of followers’ unethical behaviors. Some researchers (e.g., Effelsberg et al., 2014) have suggested that leaders’ unethical behaviors can be modeled by employees through role model influence due to legitimacy or power of their position. This phenomenon can be better understood with social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), which argues that behavioral learning occurs more through observation. Namely, individuals observe the behaviors of others and the consequences of these behaviors in order to learn which behaviors are socially acceptable and appropriate. Thus, if a reliable role model (e.g., the manager or leader) engages in a specific behavior without negative consequences, the observer is likely to model that behavior (Kerse, 2019; Greenbaum et al., 2018). However, employees may sometimes be aware that the results will be negative, or that their actions are not ethical, and they may display some unethical behaviors just because their superiors have performed them, or in order to protect the resources they have (Zhang et al., 2018). Umphress & Bingham (2011) claimed that positive social exchange relations between managers and employees can encourage UPB. Considering that high-quality LMX represents a positive social exchange between parties (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and drawing on social learning theory, this study claims that the quality of exchange that managers develop with their subordinates is an important determinant of their UPB. Taken together, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 1: LMX is positively related to UPB.

2.2 The mediating role of organizational identification

Organizational identification is an important determinant used to explain work-related attitudes and behaviors (Riketta, 2005; Chen et al., 2016). There-

fore, organizational identification may be a potential mediator in the relationship between LMX and UPB. According to the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003), leaders increase the prestige of the members who follow them thanks to high-quality LMX (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). An employee who feels that his/her dignity has increased within the organization, increases his/her identification with the organization (Zhao et al., 2019), thus increasing the possibility of the employee engaging in extra role behavior such as UPB (Blader & Tyler, 2009). When employees identify with their organization, they define themselves as “good citizens” and act according to the interests of the organization (Zhao et al., 2019).

Umphress & Bingham (2011) claimed that organizational identification is an important antecedent of UPB. Organizational identification can allow employees to perceive UPB as behaviors that are necessary for the success of the organization. Ashforth & Mael (1989) considered organizational identification as a specific form of social identity. Tajfel (1974) states that social identity of an individual is “his knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of his membership” (p. 72). In the light of this definition, employees who have high-quality LMX will feel valuable in the organization (Tyler & Blader, 2000) as they will receive more support, incentives, awards and resources beyond the provisions of the formal contract (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, it can be said that by seeing themselves as part of the organization, the probability of their identification with the organization will increase (Zhao et al., 2019). According to the group engagement model, LMX quality shapes employees’ social identities and affects their attitudes and behaviors (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Employees with high-quality LMX see themselves as the elite and view their social identity accordingly. As stated previously, employees view managers as organizational agents (Eisenberger et al., 2010) and thus manifest their social identities within the organization by identifying with their organizations (Riketta, 2005). Employees who feel strong identification with their organization care more about the interests of the organization and do not hesitate to take risks for the benefit of the organization (Chen et al., 2016). Moreover, employees may engage in UPB that they know is not morally and/or legally appropriate, even if the consequences may be harmful to them

(Umphress et al., 2010). The present study predicts that organizational identification may be a mediator in the relationship between LMX and UPB. It is therefore hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between LMX and UPB is mediated by organizational identification.

2.3 The moderating role of EUT

Attitudes refer to individual evaluations of whether an object, concept or behavior is good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2000). Unethical tolerance refers to employee attitudes about their tolerance for unethical practices in the organization (Froelich & Kottke, 1991). Some employees in organizations tolerate unethical behaviors (with high tolerance), while others may consider it to be unpleasant (low tolerance). According to Mudrack et al. (1999), individuals who are benevolent or relatively insensitive to injustice are likely to be more tolerant of unethical events. For example, some employees may have a higher tolerance of unethical behavior because they have worked in environments where unethical behavior had no negative consequences. Frequent repetition of unethical behaviors and the lack of any negative consequences may cause employees to perceive these behaviors as routine practices for performing tasks. Employees may even believe that unethical behavior is expected of them within the organization (Greenbaum et al., 2018).

Employees have specific responsibilities towards the organization, customers, shareholders, colleagues, and managers. As the number of these persons or institutions increases, so does the possibility of conflict between the parties (Froelich & Kottke, 1991). Previous studies (e.g., Greenbaum et al., 2018; Castille et al., 2018) have claimed that Machiavellian employees are more tolerant of UPB because Machiavellians believe that it is necessary to take unethical actions in order to protect the image of the organization and to gain personal benefit (Castille et al., 2018). As stated above, employee attitudes towards unethical organizational practices explain their tolerance of unethical situations (Mudrack et al., 1999). Individuals with a high tolerance of unethical situations try to perform unethical behavior and remain silent in case of unethical behaviors and events in their environment (Greenbaum et al., 2018). In line with these explanations, the present study predicts that EUT may be a moderator in the relationship between organizational

identification and UPB. For these reasons, the following hypothesis is proposed:

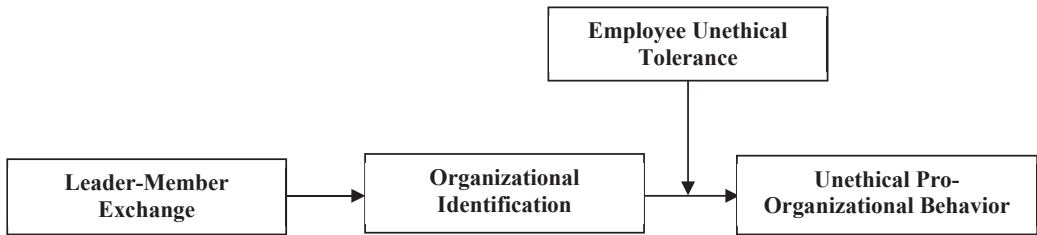
Hypothesis 3: The relationship between organizational identification and UPB is moderated by EUT, such that the positive relationship between organizational identification and UPB is weak when EUT is higher than when it is low.

The assumption that EUT can be a moderator in the relationship between organizational identification and UPB (H3) suggests a moderated mediation in which the indirect effect depends on the level of

a moderator variable (Cole et al., 2008). Therefore, it is possible for EUT to conditionally affect the indirect impact of LMX on UPB through organizational identification. In other words, the indirect effect of LMX on UPB (via organizational identification) is assumed to be weaker when EUT is low, and stronger when EUT is high. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: EUT moderates the indirect effect of LMX on UPB through organizational identification, such that the indirect effect is weak when EUT is higher than when it is low.

Figure 1 Hypothesized research model



Source: Author

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and procedure

Research data was obtained from 432 full-time employees working at a private company operating in the service sector in Turkey by adhering to voluntary and confidential survey techniques. The surveys were sent to the organization managers by email, and distributed to the employees by the managers, then collected and shared to the researcher by email. The participants' mean age was 27.4 years, 58% of the participants were male, 58.4% had a bachelor's degree, and 41.8% had 4-6 years of organizational tenure with the leader. Finally, 92.4% of the participants were subordinates and others (7.6%) were managers.

3.2 Measures

Turkish versions of all measures were created by following Brislin's (1970) translation-back translation procedures to ensure the correct translation of all relevant items in the questionnaire.

LMX. LMX was measured using Graen & Uhl-Bien's (1995) seven-item LMX scale. Sample items include "My supervisor understands my problems

and needs." Each item was assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1-absolutely disagree to 5-absolutely agree). The scale coefficient was 0.95.

Organizational identification. Organizational identification was measured using Mael & Ashforth's (1992) six-item organizational identification scale. Sample items include "This organization's successes are my successes". Each item was assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale (from 1-absolutely disagree to 5-absolutely agree). The scale coefficient was 0.87.

EUT. EUT was measured using Froelich & Kottke's (1991) 10-item EUT measure. Sample items include "It is sometimes necessary for the company to engage in shady practices because the competition is doing so". Each item was assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale (from 1 - strongly disagree to 7 - strongly agree). The scale coefficient was 0.77.

UPB. UPB was measured using Umphress et al.'s (2010) six-item UPB measures. Sample items include "If it would help the organization, I would misrepresent the truth to make the organization look good". Each item was assessed using a 7-point scale (from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree). The scale coefficient was 0.90.

Control variables. Previous studies (e.g., Umphress et al., 2010; Effelsberg et al., 2014; Miao et al., 2019) revealed that some demographic variables have potential influence on employees' UPB. Consistent with previous research, employees' ages, gender, education, leader organizational tenure and positions were controlled in this study.

4. Findings

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviation, and intercorrelation values for the variables in the study. As expected, LMX was positively correlated with UPB ($r = 0.84, p < 0.01$).

Table 1 Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for variables

Scales	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	2.33	1.21	-								
2. Gender	1.48	0.50	-0.15**	-							
3. Education	2.43	0.73	-0.55**	0.15**	-						
4. Organizational tenure	2.54	1.02	0.67**	-0.05	-0.48**	-					
5. Job position	1.92	0.27	-0.12*	0.06	0.42**	-0.08	-				
6. LMX	3.62	1.01	0.14**	-0.01	-0.06	0.04	-0.02	(0.95)			
7. OI	4.01	0.87	0.15**	0.02	-0.11*	0.06	-0.10	0.71**	(0.87)		
8. EUT	2.51	0.92	-0.13*	0.01	0.10*	-0.16**	0.05	-0.44**	-0.47**	(0.77)	
9. UPB	3.82	0.84	0.14**	-0.02	-0.11*	0.07	-0.13*	0.65**	0.84**	-0.27**	(0.90)

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; LMX = Leader-member exchange; OI = organizational identification; EUT = Employee unethical tolerance; UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior
Source: Author

4.2 Measurement models

The measurement model used in the research was tested with confirmatory factor analysis before testing the research hypotheses. Using the maximum likelihood method, whether the projected structures of the scales were supported by the data was analyzed using the alternative model strategy (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). For this, the four-factor measurement model was compared with five alternative models using chi-square difference (ΔX^2) tests. The results showed that the model fit indices of the four-factor measurement model were better than other models ($X^2(324) = 1000, p < 0.01, RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.94, SRMR = 0.07$).

4.3 Hypotheses testing

The hypotheses were tested in two steps. In step one, the mediated relationship between LMX and UPB was tested using the simple mediation model (hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2). In step two, the moderator variable EUT was included in the model in order to test whether the effect of organizational identification on UPB (hypothesis 3) and the indi-

rect effect of LMX transmitted through organizational identification on UPB (hypothesis 4) differentiated depending on high and low levels of EUT.

Regression analysis results for the mediating role are given in Table 2. As seen in Table 2, LMX had a positive direct relationship with UPB ($\beta = 0.11, p < 0.01$). Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported. To further test the mediation hypotheses (hypothesis 2), the Hayes Process Macro was used. Furthermore, to test the significance of the mediator the bootstrap method was used. The results indicated that the indirect effect of LMX on UPB (via organizational identification) is significant ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.01$). Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported. However, in order to be able to say that hypothesis 2 is fully supported, bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) regarding the indirect effect of LMX on UPB should be examined (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Since bootstrap confidence interval values (95% CI = .38 to .54) of the indirect effect do not contain zeros, it can be said that the indirect effect is significant. Thus, hypothesis 2 is fully supported.

Table 2 Regression results for the mediation effect

	Organizational identification			
	B	SE	t	p
Age	0.04	0.05	1.04	0.30
Gender	0.07	0.06	1.07	0.32
Education	0.11	0.05	2.38	0.02
Organizational tenure	0.02	0.04	0.40	0.69
Job position	-0.13	0.13	-1.05	0.29
LMX	0.61	0.03	18.84	0.00
	UPB			
	B	SE	t	p
Age	0.01	0.03	0.46	0.65
Gender	-0.03	0.05	-0.62	0.54
Education	0.14	0.04	3.82	0.00
Organizational tenure	0.01	0.04	0.35	0.73
Job position	-0.04	0.10	-0.36	0.71
Direct effect of LMX	0.11	0.04	2.98	0.00
Organizational identification	0.75	0.05	18.24	0.00
Total effect of LMX	0.56	0.03	16.33	0.00
	Effect	SE	LLCI%95	ULCI%95
Indirect effect of LMX on UPB via OI	0.45	0.04	0.38	0.54

Note: N=432; Bootstrap sample size = 5.000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit; LMX = Leader-member exchange; UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior; OI = organizational identification

Source: Author

Hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4 were tested using the Hayes Process Macro (Hayes, 2018). To reduce multicollinearity, all interaction terms were centered (Aiken & West, 1991). As indicated in Table 3,

the interaction term between organizational identification and EUT was significantly related to UPB ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.01$).

Table 3 Regression results for moderated mediation

	UPB			
	B	SE	t	p
Age	0.01	0.03	0.33	0.74
Gender	-0.03	0.05	-0.69	0.49
Education	0.11	0.03	3.16	0.00
Organizational tenure	0.04	0.03	1.19	0.24
Job position	-0.07	0.09	-0.73	0.47
LMX	0.16	0.03	4.93	0.00
Organizational identification	0.69	0.04	16.01	0.00
EUT	0.21	0.03	6.86	0.00
OIxEUT	0.12	0.02	5.37	0.00
Conditional effect of OI on UPB				
EUT	B	SE	t	p
-1 SD (-.92)	0.60	0.06	10.73	0.00
M (.00)	0.71	0.04	16.45	0.00
+1 SD (.92)	0.83	0.05	20.94	0.00
Conditional indirect effects at OI= M ±1 SD				
EUT	Boot indirect effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
-1 SD (-.92)	0.36	0.04	0.28	0.45
M (.00)	0.43	0.04	0.36	0.51
+1 SD (.92)	0.51	0.04	0.42	0.58
Index of conditional indirect effects	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.11

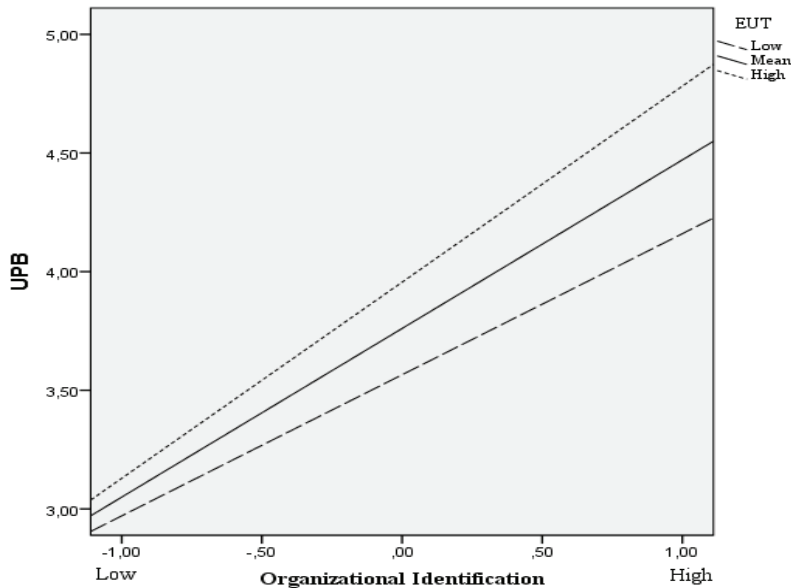
Note: SD = Standard deviation; SE = Standard error. Bootstrap sample size = 5.000. LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit; LMX = Leader-member exchange; UPB = Unethical pro-organizational behavior; EUT = Employee unethical tolerance; OI = organizational identification

Source: Author

The results indicated that the relationship between organizational identification and UPB (Figure 2) was stronger for employees with high EUT (simple

slope = 0.60, $p < .01$) than for those with low EUT (simple slope = 0.83, $p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Figure 2 EUT moderator effect on the relationship between organizational identification and UPB



Source: Author

Furthermore, hypothesis 4 predicted that EUT moderated the mediated relationship between LMX and UPB through organizational identification. Since EUT was centralized (Aiken & West, 1991), a low value of EUT (-0.92) was defined as the value with a distance of -1 standard deviation from the center, and a high value (0.92) was defined as the value with a distance of +1 standard deviation from the center (see Table 3). The results showed that the conditional indirect effect of LMX on UPB was significant ($\beta = .36$, 95% CI = [.28, .45]; $\beta = .51$, 95% CI = [.42, .58]). Thus, hypothesis 4 is supported.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study have contributed to the literature in various ways. The first contribution to the literature is that it reveals that LMX with positive outcomes for employees, managers and organizations are not always beneficial. Previous studies (e.g., Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Scandura, 1999) focused on the positive sides of LMX, neglecting the negative sides. The current study contributes to the debate about whether high LMX is always beneficial (e.g., Greenbaum et al., 2018) by revealing that

high LMX has a positive impact on unethical employee behavior.

Second, researchers (i.e., Chen et al., 2016; Umphress et al., 2010) have called for additional studies to investigate mediators that may help us better understand the formation of UPB. To address these calls, organizational identification is verified in this study as a mediator in the relationship between LMX and UPB. According to the group engagement model (Tyler & Blader, 2003; Blader & Tyler, 2009), employees can create a strong social identity with the group (in-group) thanks to high-quality LMX, and perform extra role behaviors (e.g., UPB) for the benefit of the organization. This study is important in terms of revealing how LMX affects UPB according to the group engagement model. Umphress et al. (2010) stated that the effect of organizational identification on UPB should be examined with different variables. In line with the suggestion of Umphress et al. (2010), this study predicted that LMX indirectly increases UPB by positively effecting organizational identification. The research findings confirmed that high-quality LMX that managers develop with their employees allows them to feel valued in the group and in the

organization, increasing in this way their organizational identification and indirectly increasing their UPB. This result is important in terms of shedding light on the claims that organizational identification can be harmful to the organization. Previous studies (e.g., Mael & Tetrick, 1992) focused more on the positive side, neglecting the dark side of organizational identification. In the present study, the finding that UPBs can be increased by increasing organizational identification of employees contributed to the claims about the dark side of organizational identification (e.g., Dukerich et al., 1998). An employee, who is strongly identified with their organization, may ignore or display these unethical behaviors that the organization unwittingly or consciously demonstrates (Chen et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the results indicated that the mediated relationship between LMX and UPB via organizational identification is stronger for employees with high EUT. This result is an important contribution to previous studies (e.g., Umphress et al., 2010) examining the relationship between organizational identification and UPB in terms of revealing that this relationship changes according to the level of EUT. In addition, the indirect effect of LMX on UPB through organizational identification differs according to low and high levels of EUT, as expected. Low-level EUT reduced the indirect effect of LMX on UPB by reducing the positive effect of organizational identification on UPB.

It is possible to reach some practical conclusions based on the findings of the study. In the research, managers were informed that the quality of their exchanges with employees affected their organizational identification and that they therefore demonstrated more UPB. Although high-quality LMX is desirable and encouraged in organizations (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), it should be noted that employees can model negative behaviors due to their high-quality LMX (Greenbaum et al., 2018). Employees' role modeling of their legal or unethical behaviors, thanks to mutual trust-based exchanges with their managers, reflects the proverb, 'if you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas'. Employees observing their managers' unethical behavior in organizations may cause changes in their ways of thinking about the possibility of being punished for unethical behavior, and lead them to recalculate the costs related to the benefits of similar behaviors (Zhang

et al., 2018). Managers should also keep in mind that unethical behavior can cause great harm to the organization and employees in the long term. A manager's unethical behavior for the benefit of the organization may lead employees to follow similar actions. For this reason, the organization should regulate behavior of the leaders and thus prevent the spread of UPB within firms.

Employees who have high-quality LMX (in-group) contribute more to the outputs desired by the organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, employees who have high-quality LMX have more opportunities (e.g., social support, authority, resources, self-efficacy) than employees who have low-quality LMX (out-group) (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008). Furthermore, employees' tendencies toward unethical behaviors can be reduced by ensuring that the human resources department properly applies the necessary employment procedures. For example, managers (or recruiters) could be trained on the characteristics of candidates with a Machiavellian personality. Training managers to identify candidates with these characteristics can help them reliably identify individuals prone to UPB (Castille et al., 2018). In addition, managers should be aware that promoting organizational identification risks encouraging UPBs, and this risk is particularly high for employees with high EUT.

5.1 Limitations and recommendations

In addition to the above-mentioned contributions, the study also has some limitations. The first limitation is that although the theoretical arguments support the causal design of the research model, the causality of the research results could not be determined sufficiently due to the fact that the research data were collected using the cross-sectional method (Levin, 2006). Future studies can adequately reveal the causality of their research findings by obtaining data using longitudinal or experimental methods. The second limitation is that UPB is evaluated according to employees' self-reported responses. Umphress et al. (2010) stated that self-reporting is appropriate because managers or colleagues do not have enough foresight to assess the intentions behind focal unethical employee behavior. Nevertheless, future studies can use UPB evaluations of managers and colleagues to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

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