

LMX & Grit: The Effects of Abusive Supervision and Member Grittiness on Leader-Member Relationships

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High-quality leader-member exchanges (LMX) have been linked to positive outcomes for employees and organizations. However, not all LMX exchanges are virtuous, ethical, and effective. This paper proposes a theoretical model that explains how follower motivation is negatively impacted under abusive supervision. We propose that this may be observed through follower management of personal goals under abusive supervision and present an alternative outcome drawing on the notion of grit. We suggest that abusive supervision will act as a moderator of LMX when followers perceive career growth opportunities. Furthermore, we suggest member grittiness will act as a moderated-moderator of abusive supervision.

Keywords: Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, grit, abusive supervision

INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of Vertical Linkage Dyad (VDL) theory by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga in 1975, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has been among the most researched models by leadership scholars during the past 45 years. The promotion of high-quality leader-member exchanges has been linked to positive outcomes for employees and organizations. For example, employees tended to identify their job responsibilities as more desirable and were more satisfied with their jobs (Dansereau et al., 1975). High LMX also showed increased employee satisfaction, improved performance, enhanced job outcomes, and decreased turnover (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). However, not all LMX exchanges are virtuous, ethical, and effective. Leadership has a negative side with destructive implications for the LMX relationship, as in cases where LMX masks negative leader traits, including narcissism and psychopathy (Lyons, Moorman, & Mercado, 2019). Although Conger (1990) argued that leadership research focused almost exclusively on positive aspects, warning some leadership traits and

skills, such as strategic vision, communication and impression-management skills, and general management practices, may produce negative outcomes for both leaders and organizations, leadership studies may still be excessively positive (Alvesson & Einola, 2019).

A meta-analysis conducted by Schyns and Schilling (2013) found that followers of what they termed “destructive leaders” are likely to have negative attitudes and show resistance towards leaders (p. 148). These followers tended to experience greater negative affectivity and occupational stress and viewed their jobs and organizations with dissatisfaction (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). While it is clear from such findings that follower perspectives are paramount to investigation of leader-member exchanges, such research remains largely unexplored. We propose a theoretical model that explains how follower (i.e., member) motivation is negatively impacted under abusive supervision. Additionally, our model suggests that this may be observed through follower management of personal goals, such as career advancement or job longevity, under circumstances of abusive supervision. In such cases, the follower is most likely to terminate the leader-member relationship as a result of low-quality exchanges.

We present an alternative outcome drawing on the notion of grit, a relatively new concept to the leadership literature. Rooted in motivation and goal theories, grit has been growing in popularity among education scholars over the past ten years. Grit is a measure of long-term goal commitment and has been shown to predict success in a variety of contexts (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth, Quinn, & Seligman, 2009; Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, & Duckworth, 2014). If grit can accurately measure how committed one is towards completing a long-term goal, it is reasonable to think that high grit will be more likely to maintain social exchanges with a leader, if doing so will help with attainment of that superordinate goal, even under circumstances where one’s leader is abusive (e.g., blames or ridicules followers). Our model suggests that abusive supervision will act as a moderator on the quality of perceived exchanges between leaders and members when the follower perceives potential career growth opportunities. Furthermore, member grittiness will act as a moderated-moderator of abusive supervision, in that it may allow for the potential mitigation of outcomes associated with destructive leadership (e.g., termination of the leader-member relationship).

As will be presented herein, the strong predictive qualities of LMX, abusive supervision, and grit make these constructs ideal for testing the relationship between leader-member relationships and follower (i.e., member) motivation. To begin, a brief review of the literature regarding LMX will be presented, including its connections to member motivational qualities and individual goals. Next, the damaging impacts of abusive supervision are presented. Lastly, grit will be defined and the brief history of its use as a predictive construct will be outlined. Finally, implications and recommendations for future research are discussed, including appropriate measures for testing this theoretical model.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) were among the first to discuss the supervisor-subordinate relationship, or what was deemed Vertical Linkage Dyad (VDL) theory as a new concept in leadership scholarship. The term dyad appears to have been first introduced by Chester Barnard in the 1930's and most simply defined a cooperative relationship as one based on exchanges, or negotiations between two people (Graen & Scandura, 1987). VDL challenged previous work on supervisor-subordinate interactions which followed two major assumptions: first, that the ‘work group’ was considered a single unit, and second, that the leader’s treatment of all followers was essentially the same toward all members (Dansereau et al., 1975; Dienesch, Liden, Scandura, Taber, & Vecchio, 1986). It is worth noting that leader-member exchange theory was more effective at predicting employee turnover than were previous models based on such assumptions (Dienesch et al., 1986).

Vertical Dyad Linkages (VDL) Theory

Dansereau et al.’s (1975) work focused alternatively on the individual relationship between the leader (e.g., superior) and the member (e.g., subordinate), what was termed a vertical dyad. These relationships

tended to develop quickly and remain consistent over time (Dienesch et al., 1986). On the basis of VDL theory, the key factor that determined the development of a dyadic relationship was the extent of latitude granted to a member at the onset of the relationship in the ability to negotiate job-related matters (Dansereau et al., 1975). Greater latitude, as suggested by Dansereau et al. (1975), was demonstrative of leadership behavior or increased social exchanges, whereas less negotiation latitude indicated supervisory behavior or minimal social exchange.

Dansereau et al.'s (1975) work was among the earliest research that investigated the processes linking the leader and the member, and proposed that the relationship developed over time based on a series of vertical exchanges. In contrast to VDL theory, which focused on the extent of latitude provided, the basis of leader-member exchange theory consisted of a role that was developed or negotiated through an informal and unstructured process of social exchanges (Dienesch et al., 1986). The type (e.g., quality) of exchanges that occurred were determinant based on the degree to which they were reliant on the formal employment contract (Dansereau et al., 1975). For example, a situation in which the leader and member had minimal (e.g., low quality) social exchanges would be dictated entirely by the fulfillment of the employment contract and could occur without the development of any personal relationship between the leader and member, "...rather [one] has the means to treat the member much as [one] would a part in a complex machine" (Dansereau et al., 1975 p. 49).

Role Making

Alternatively, a leader could draw upon the interpersonal exchange relationship with their follower in order to influence that member (Dansereau et al., 1975). In this case, the leader and member would make exchanges and negotiate on the basis of their mutual interdependence (Dansereau et al., 1975). Such dyadic transactions have since been deemed *role making* (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Graen and Scandura (1987) defined three stages of the role making process: (1) Role taking (sampling phase), (2) role making (role development phase), and (3) role routinization (commitment phase).

This process was initiated when a superior became aware of an unstructured task that required attention and worked toward enlisting members to collaborate (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Unstructured tasks are those that are beyond an employee's specified job duties (e.g., outside of the formal employment contract) thus, the willingness of select members to collaborate in this process laid the groundwork for social exchanges to occur (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Dansereau's (1995) work led to two assumptions: (1) Leaders have individual characteristics that influence how they interact with their followers, and (2) leaders may delegate tasks in such a way that some followers become like *trusted assistants* and others like *hired hands*. Work units then became essentially split into two groups of employees: Members who were willing to participate in unstructured tasks, and those who were not (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

LMX differentiation is grounded in the idea that leaders do not act with a general approach towards an entire group of followers, but rather that leaders differentiate amongst followers, forming unique relationships with each member (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2005). These relationships are typically determined early-on and tend to be highly effective (e.g., trusted assistants) or highly ineffective (e.g., hired hands). High quality relationships are characterized by factors such as more challenging job assignments, better communication, and greater support from one's leader, among other things (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2005). Low quality exchanges are characterized by limited interactions with the leader as well as less trust and support.

An in-depth look at role making helps provide insight to the process of differentiation. In phase one, role taking, the superior (i.e., leader) is essentially gauging the member's response to a request (Graen & Scandura, 1987). This phase frequently allows the leader to learn a great deal about the member's capabilities and likely future behavior (Graen & Scandura, 1987). In the following role making phase, social exchange occurs. For example, the leader makes a request of the member and then the member negotiates or makes a counter-offer. If a social exchange does not occur, the process does not progress to a more developed relationship (e.g., the leader looks for a new member with whom to collaborate). In this phase, the leader could exchange resources in order to complete an unstructured task. These resources may include, information, influence, tasks, latitude, support, and/or attention (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

After collaboration during the initial unstructured task through which role making is established, the leader and member will continue to make exchanges through unstructured tasks over time which result in role routinization. This works to establish an interdependent relationship in which either the member or the leader can initiate an exchange. Such a relationship is characterized by "dimensions of trust, respect, loyalty, liking, intimacy, support, openness, and honesty (quality)" which are mutual expectations of behavior (Graen & Scandura, 1987, p. 184).

Trust and LMX Outcomes

Building on the role making model, Bauer and Green (1996) hypothesized that trust was an integral component during each of the three main stages: (1) Role taking – cognitive evaluations of trust, (2) role making – behavioral trust, and (3) role routinization – affective trust outcomes. The findings of Bauer and Green's (1996) work indicated that delegation of tasks were related LMX outcomes. Additionally, the leader and member's affectivity similarity was found to be related to the leader's performance judgements.

Furthermore, task delegation and performance over time appeared to have a positive relationship, which supported previous findings about the development of interpersonal trust (Bauer & Green, 1996). Not surprisingly then, performance-delegation was found to be highly effective in predicting the outcome of LMX over time. This indicates that a leader's judgement of member performance is important to the development of LMX because of its relationship to interpersonal trust (Bauer & Green, 1996). The findings of this study additionally suggest that leader-member similarity may predispose a leader to judge a member's performance more favorably, which could impact the overall quality of LMX as an outcome.

In-Group/Out-Group Members and LMX Outcomes

A longitudinal study conducted by Dansereau et al. (1975) assessed relationships based on their negotiating latitude and distinguished those dyads with minimal social exchanges as being members of the *out-group* and those dyads based on more social exchanges as being members of the *in-group*. The results of this study showed that members of the in-group received more attention and support from their leaders than did members of the out-group (Dansereau et al., 1975). Relationships with members of the in-group tended to be characterized by greater trust as well as increased interaction, support, and rewards from the leader by comparison to members of the out-group (Dienesch et al., 1986).

Work by Dienesch et al. (1986) further purported that leaders would only develop a few of these high-quality relationships amongst the members within their work group, characterized as the in-group. Other members within the unit were part of the out-group and were influenced through the leader's formal authority, such as organizational rules and policies (Dienesch et al., 1986). Additionally, members of the in-group tended to demonstrate behaviors which were viewed as more valuable, or preferable by their leader, than did members of the out-group (Dansereau et al., 1975).

Members of the in-group also identified their job responsibilities as more desirable and were more generally satisfied with their jobs in comparison to members of the out-group (Dansereau et al., 1975). Beyond this, members of the in-group generally received more support and flexibility with regard to non-work problems (Dienesch et al., 1986) and had better communication with their leader (Graen & Scandura, 1987). They also tended to believe their leader valued their self-worth (Dansereau, 1995). Other positive outcomes associated with high quality LMX showed increased employee satisfaction, improved performance, and enhanced job outcomes, as well as a decrease in turnover rates (Schriesheim et al., 1999).

Transactional and Transformational Leadership as LMX

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) further described these social exchanges through the lens of existing leadership theory, proposing that LMX was both transactional (leadership) and transformational (leadership) in that a leader-member relationship is initially based on transactional exchanges (e.g., material exchanges such as fulfilling the employment contract), but may evolve to transformational social exchanges (e.g., psychological exchanges such as trust, approval, support, etc.). Defining this process within the existing literature frameworks helped explain why only some leader-member relationships

were characterized by high levels of trust (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). That is to say, after the testing phase (i.e., role taking phase) occurs, on the basis of limited transactional exchanges, only some relationships will evolve into exchanges that are transformational or greater than those based on self-interest alone (e.g., characterized by trust) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Individualized Leadership (IL)

Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) work closely followed a secondary branch of VDL theory, which differed from LMX in that it focused on the individualized leadership (IL) as opposed to the relationship between the leader and member (Schriesheim et al., 1999). Further, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), proposed that these leader-member relationships are characterized by the leader's individualized approach to leadership with the member. Specifically, a leader using a transactional approach will have minimal involvement with their follower as the relationship is primarily based on the contractual agreement of employment (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In contrast, a leader using transformational leadership will have a much more advanced dyadic relationship with their follower, resulting in stronger follower commitment to the organization at large (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Thus, highly effective LMX relationships are transformational, not transactional.

Work by Wang et al. (2005) added credence to this proposition by showing that the relationship between transformational leadership and employee outcomes, including task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) (e.g., behaviors beyond those specified in the formal work contract), are completely mediated by the quality of LMX experienced by the leader and member. Focus on leadership behavior was a turning point for understanding leader-member relationships beyond the construct of in-group or out-group members, further recognizing that leader-member relationships exist at different levels of effectiveness ranging from transactional to transformational. Schriesheim et al. (1999) later criticized this work by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) for failing to justify the shift in focus from the leader and follower relationship (e.g., LMX) to the leader's individualized leadership approach (e.g., individualized leadership).

Characteristics of High Quality LMX

Dienesch et al. (1986) identified three continuous variables of mutuality that define high quality exchanges: (1) perceived contribution to the exchange (e.g. toward furthering mutual goals), (2) loyalty (e.g., commitment), and (3) affect (e.g., interpersonal attraction to each other). Building on this foundation, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), proposed that the leader-member relationship is based on the work relationship (as opposed to a personal or friendship relationship) and that it requires three characteristics: respect, trust, and obligation. More specifically, the researchers proposed that the leader-member relationship would only be offered and accepted when these three dimensions are fulfilled: (1) mutual respect for one another's capabilities, (2) mutual trust and the ability to further develop trust with each other, and (3) the belief that interaction obligation will provide opportunities for exchanges that result in a partnership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

According to Bauer and Green (1996), every leader-member relationship (or leader-member-exchange) will be unique and appear differently because it is dependent on the amount of time, types of exchanges that occur, and the investment that each party is willing to put forth in development of the relationship. Sparrowe and Liden's (1997) work echoed this claim, purporting that the quality of the member's exchange relationship with the leader is based on the perceived leader's support and exchanges of valued resources. Some exchanges or relationships are high-quality and some are low-quality (Bauer & Green, 1996). Moreover, high-quality exchanges are characterized by high levels of trust and respect (Bauer & Green, 1996).

Limitations: Contextual & Cultural Factors

Hooper and Martin (2008) highlighted one major limitation of LMX as the theory looks exclusively at the leader-member dyad without consideration for the larger work context (e.g., work team). The research by Sherony and Green (2002), for instance, found that coworker exchanges (CWX) were of significant

importance in looking at the relationship between a leader and their members. Their work revealed that the quality of the relationships between coworkers tended to be higher when differentiation of LMX was low between the members (e.g., members experienced similar quality of LMXs either all high or all low). Perhaps of equal importance, the findings of a similar study by Hooper and Martin (2008) suggested that follower perceptions of leader fairness (e.g., having high-quality LMX with undeserving members) impacted the quality of relationships with other members as well as overall perceptions of conflict within the workgroup.

Dienesch et al. (1986) discussed additional contextual factors that could impact the LMX relationship, such as a leader's resources (e.g., time), organizational policies (e.g., labor contract), and culture of the organization (e.g., value for interpersonal relationships). It is important to consider culture in relation to LMX theory, as some factors may be more or less valued depending upon the cultural context. For example, some Eastern cultures, such as that of Japan, tend to favor loyalty and commitment more than American culture (Hofstede, 2001; Ouchi, 1981).

Moreover, findings by Sparrowe and Liden (1997) provided implications for diversity between leaders and members. Specifically, their exploration of the impact of social networks on quality of LMX and a leader's propensity to sponsor a member, demonstrated similarity attraction between a leader and member on the basis of demographic characteristics, among other factors (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Attention to this finding is warranted as dissimilarity between a leader and their members may result in systematic exclusion of individuals unrelated to member performance (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997).

Understanding Motivation, Goals, and LMX

While there is an abundance of research designated to the exploration of LMX theory, the evaluation of the exchange from the perspective of the member (e.g., follower) remains limited. Dienesch et al. (1986) suggested that member responses to autonomy may impact the relationship outcome. For example, newcomers to the organization may respond negatively to autonomy, but incumbents (e.g., transfers from a different unit) may value autonomy. In an attempt to better understand the follower's motivation for engaging in social exchanges with their leader, we turn to work conducted by Graen and Scandura (1987).

In a phenomenological study, Graen and Scandura (1987) identified three primary variables that impacted dyadic organizing, or the likelihood of an exchange relationship to develop: (1) adequate latitude and the need to use this latitude, (2) attractiveness of resources (e.g., power), and (3) members possessing the necessary skills and desire, or motivation, to take part in unstructured tasks. The third variable requires that a member have both ability and motivation to collaborate in unstructured tasks (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Additionally, their research revealed a positive relationship between a member's propensity to complete unstructured tasks and personal career development or advancement (Graen & Scandura, 1987). These findings suggest that individuals who are career-track minded are more motivated to engage in social exchanges if/when it aligns with the member's long-term career goal(s). It is on the basis that we form our first proposition:

Proposition 1: *A member will be more likely to partake in social exchanges with their leader when doing so is perceived as beneficial toward achieving the member's long-term career goals (e.g., the member believes there are career growth opportunities available within their current organization).*

Clearly, understanding the likelihood of a member to engage in social exchanges is of significance as high LMX has been associated with higher task performance, increased citizenship behaviors, and less counterproductive work behaviors (Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016). In alignment with the previous work discussed by Bauer and Green (1996), a recent meta-analysis of LMX literature by Martin et al. (2016), revealed that trust in one's leader is the single most important factor in determining follower participation in social exchanges. This concept is key as we now move to discussion of abusive supervision, a set of behaviors that are likely to damage one's trust in their leader and subsequently, result in low LMX between leaders and their followers.

The Impact of Abusive Supervision

The Dark Side of Leadership

Not all social exchanges are virtuous, ethical, and effective. Leadership, in practice, has a negative side with the potential to influence the relationship between leaders and followers in a destructive way (Northouse, 2019). Researchers have labeled this destructive side of leadership using a variety of terms including “the dark side of leadership,” “toxic leadership,” and “abusive leadership” (Northouse, 2020, p. 359). Although this dark or toxic side of leadership has been found to influence follower behaviors and organizational outcomes, it remains largely unexplored within existing leadership theories (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). Conger (1990) argued that much focus in leadership research has been on the positive aspects alone, though some of these same leadership traits and skills (e.g., strategic vision, communications and impression-management skills, and general management practices) may occasionally produce negative outcomes for both the leader and the organization.

Clemet and Washbush (1999) listed “bad decision making, frustration, dysfunctional organizations, unintended consequences, wasted resources, ruined careers, and scores of other negatives” as potential outcomes resulting from failed leadership (p. 171). In 2000, Tepper explored the effects of abusive supervisory behaviors and found that subordinates who were subject to this nonphysical abuse were more likely to quit their jobs. He also found that those who remained in jobs under abusive supervision had lower job and life satisfaction (Tepper, 2000). In their meta-analysis of 57 destructive leadership studies, Schyns and Schilling (2013) found that followers of what they call “destructive leaders” are likely to have negative attitudes towards their leaders, resulting in resistance (p. 148). They also found evidence that destructive leadership is related to follower experiences of negative affectivity and occupational stress as well as poor attitudes towards their job and the organization (Schyns & Schilling, 2013).

Understanding the Complexity of Abusive Supervision

The complexity of destructive leadership runs deeper than leader behavior alone. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) developed a model termed, the Toxic Leadership Triangle in which they identify three key elements required for destructive leadership to occur. Specifically, the presence of a *destructive leader*, *susceptible followers*, and *conducive environments* are critical for cultivating toxic leadership (Padilla et al., 2007). Followers in these environments fall into two different categories: conformers and colluders. Padilla et al. (2007) propose that the motivations for these two groups are different. Conformers are complicit with these toxic leaders to minimize some sort of loss, while colluders comply with and even participate in the destructive activity out of a quest for personal gain (Padilla et al., 2007).

Subsequently, Lipman-Blumen (2005) attempted to explain why people follow these toxic leaders by examining the ways that leaders fulfill follower needs. These include needs internal to the follower’s psyche, needs in the individual’s external environment, and psychosocial needs that arise from social interactions (Lipman-Blumen, 2010). For example, followers may find that they are driven to follow an abusive leader because working for them pays their mortgage or children’s doctor bills, provides some sort of political or occupational access or membership, or provides a feeling of safety in a time of existential angst (Lipman-Blumen, 2010).

Researchers have also looked at how destructive leaders influence leader-member exchange relationships. Work by Xu et al. (2012) demonstrated the damaging impact of abusive supervision on the quality of exchanges between leaders and their members. As a mediator, lower-quality exchanges are the result of abusive supervision and cause undesirable work-related behaviors (e.g., reduced task performance) (Xu et al., 2012). Analogously, Decoster et al. (2014) established that the quality of exchanges mediate the relationship between active-aggressive and passive-aggressive abusive supervision and member’s organizational citizenship behaviors. Because prior research suggests that destructive leaders cause more negative attitudes towards their leaders and an overall decrease in these productive work behaviors, it follows that the mutual respect, trust, and obligation required for high-quality leader-member exchanges will also be damaged (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Furthermore, we suggest that a leader’s abusive supervision will act as a moderator on the relationship

between a follower's long-term career goals and willingness to engage in social exchanges, leading to proposition two:

Proposition 2: *A leader's abusive supervision of the member will moderate the relationship between a member's career growth opportunities and social exchanges. Specifically, higher levels of abusive supervision will decrease the likelihood of a member to engage in social exchanges with their leader, regardless of career growth opportunities.*

Grit: Passion and Effort Sustained Over Years

Although the motivational concept of *grit* has been absent from the leadership literature until recently, there is some indication it may be a moderating factor on leader-member social exchanges. Early research of the construct was generally focused on educational environments and it has increasingly become a topic of conversation in the workplace. As its popularity has increased in recent years, more research is being done in psychology to understand and identify the usefulness of this construct.

Having grit or being gritty involves working persistently toward challenges and maintaining effort and interest over years in the face of failure and adversity (Duckworth et al., 2007). In the eyes of a gritty person, achievement is best realized by being resilient over a sustained period of time to reach a long-term goal. Although many constructs in research are diverse in their description, *grit* has remained fairly consistent in its definition as, "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth et al., 2007; Hill, et al., 2014; Larkin-Wong & Hogan, 2013; Lucas et al., 2015; Ris, 2015; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Von Culin et al., 2014). Here, we define grit using a more recent description as "the tenacious pursuit of a dominant superordinate goal despite setbacks" (Duckworth & Gross, 2014, p. 319).

Grit's High Predictability in Research

While research of this construct is in its infancy, research focused on grit is quickly developing in educational and organizational literature. Recently, a number of studies have shown that grit predicted success in students' completion of challenging goals in the face of setbacks and challenging situations. Grittier students have been found to outperform their less gritty peers and are more likely to graduate from high school (Duckworth et al., 2007; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Grit scores were also associated with higher GPA's (Duckworth et al., 2007). In a study looking at Black male collegians at predominately white institutions, it was found that grittier Black males earned higher grades in college than their less gritty same-race male peers (Strayhorn, 2013). In the same study, Strayhorn (2013) also reported that grittier Black male collegians tended to have higher grades in high school and higher scores on the ACT (Strayhorn, 2013). These higher grades correlated with grit scores even after controlling for differences in age, year in school, transfer status, engagement activities, degree aspirations, and prior achievement (Strayhorn, 2013). The construct of grit has also been linked to student success in spelling bees. Research by Duckworth et al., (2011) found that grittier spelling bee contestants were more likely to persist in deliberate practice even though the practice activities were less intrinsically rewarding than other types of preparation. These grittier students' commitment to dull practice activities showed tremendous goal commitment and predicted the student's final performance in the spelling bee (Duckworth et al., 2011).

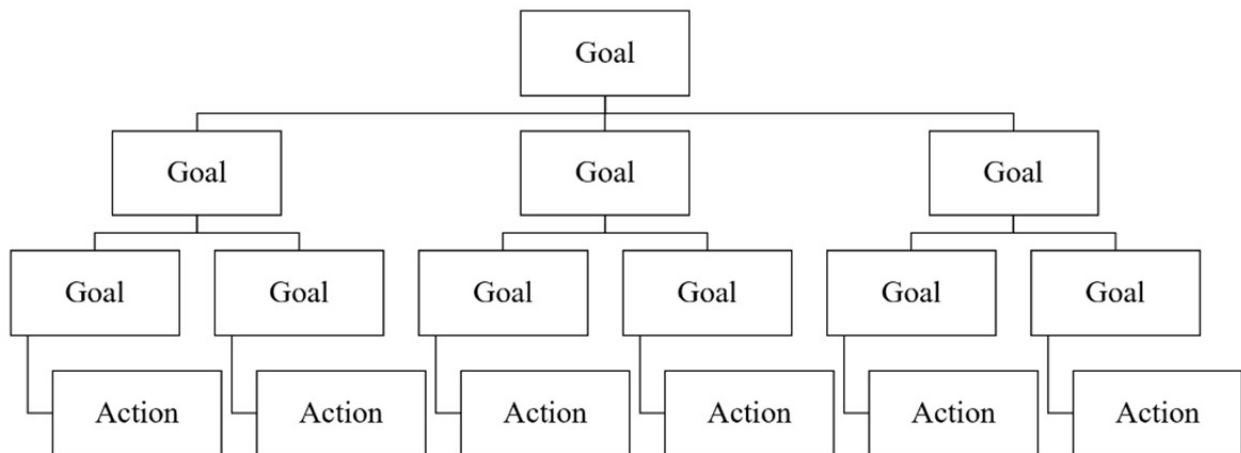
Additionally, grit has been linked to retention and commitment. In one study, West Point Academy Cadets' scores on the grit scale accurately predicted retention through the rigorous special operations (Army Special Operations Forces or ARSOF) training program (Duckworth et al., 2007; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Similarly, grit has also been connected to predictions of first year teacher retention and performance (Duckworth et al., 2009). Grittier teachers exceeded the performance of their less gritty colleagues and were less likely to quit mid-way through the school year (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). Gritty sales representatives were found to be more likely to remain at their jobs long-term (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Eskreis-Winkler and colleagues (2014) also concluded that gritty men were found more likely to remain married than their less gritty peers.

Distinguishing Grit From Other Constructs

Although having some similarities with other concepts, grit has been shown to be distinct from a variety of existing constructs. Grit has been differentiated from the need for achievement or *nAchievement* (McClelland, 1961). McClelland (1961) described *nAchievement* as a drive to complete manageable goals that are not too easy or too hard and allow for immediate feedback on performance (Duckworth et al., 2007; McClelland, 1985). Gritty individuals are different in that they set long-term goals and do not deviate from these goals, even in the absence of positive feedback (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Grit has also been distinguished from resilience in some of the recent literature. Although its definitions are varied and multidimensional, resilience is often described as a successful adaptation in the face of overwhelming adversity and anxiety (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). Such definitions are generally ambiguous in the area of the stability of an individual's interests over time. Although it may be argued as a form of resilience, grit is distinct in that an individual's unwavering interest in obtaining a long-term goal is one of its key components (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

Grit has also been distinguished from the construct of self-control. The difference between the two can be best understood using a hierarchical goal framework (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
HIERARCHICAL GOAL FRAMEWORK (ADAPTED FROM DUCKWORTH & GROSS, 2014)



In this framework, goals are generally organized in a hierarchy with fewer high-level goals and multiple lower level goals that prompt actions (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Self-control is best described as the aligning of actions with a valued goal despite being tempted momentarily by more appealing alternatives (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). These alternatives, for the moment, may be stronger but align with a less enduringly valued goal (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Self-control is the successful resolution of a conflict between an impulse corresponding to a goal valued in the moment and one of greater enduring value. Grit, on the other hand, is coupled with higher level goals that take longer to achieve. Gritty people are motivated to work towards a dominant higher-level goal despite having a rival higher-level goal. In distinction from self-control, gritty people have the ability to suppress this rival goal or they just simply lack a competing superordinate goal all together (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Gritty people are able to create new lower order goals when faced with failure or setbacks and then vigorously pursue them in their long-term quest to reach this superordinate goal. It is also argued that grit is distinct from dependability, specifically that of the self-control aspects, in that a person may be dependable and have self-control in the short-term, but not possess those higher level, long-term goals to keep them persistent in the long-term (Duckworth & Gross, 2014).

There has also been debate in the literature pinning grit against the Big Five's personality trait, *conscientiousness*. Being the first researchers to replicate the five-factor structure, Tupes and Christal

(1961) and Norman (1963) are generally credited with the founding the five-factor model (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Norman, 1963; Tupes & Christal, 1961). The model consists of five dimensions including (1) neuroticism, (2) extraversion, (3) openness to experience, (4) agreeableness, and (5) conscientiousness. Since its inception, the Big Five model has been researched extensively. Even though many leadership scholars have considered trait theories to be obsolete, the Big Five model has shown significant correlation to leadership criteria. Judge et al. (2002) deemed the model a “fruitful basis for examining the dispositional predictors of leadership” (773), and reported extraversion and conscientiousness were the two traits most strongly correlated to leadership. Conscientiousness is routinely divided into two primary facets – achievement and dependability – and has been strongly linked to job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Mount & Barrick, 1995).

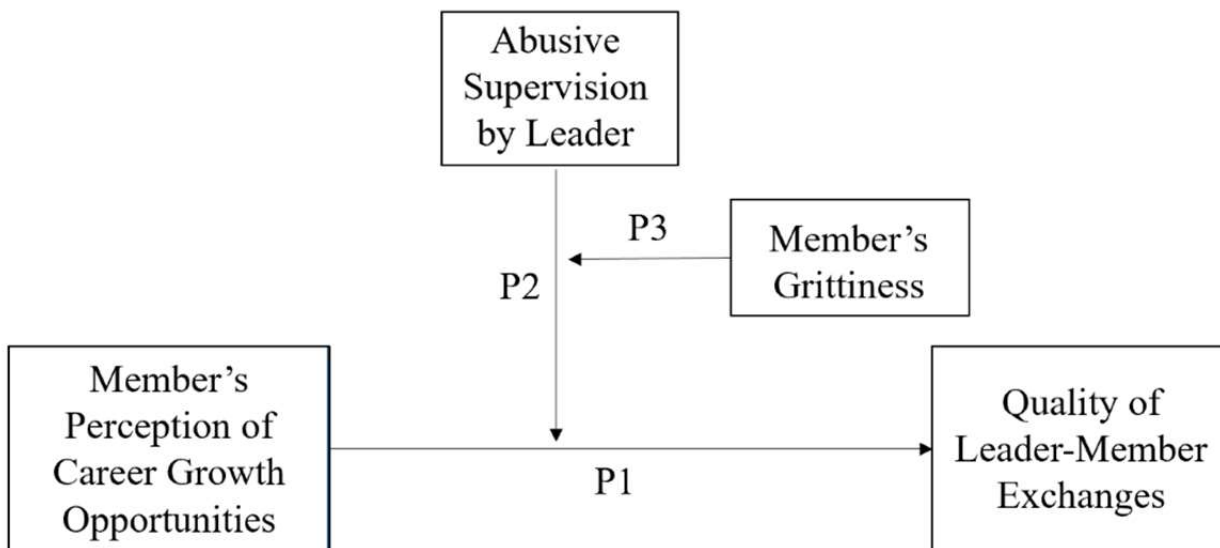
The high predictability of job performance has led some researchers to claim that grit and conscientiousness are too closely associated. Rimfeld et al.’s (2016) study of 2,321 twin pairs found that grit and conscientiousness are “to a large extent the same trait both phenotypically ($r = 0.53$) and genetically (genetic correlation = 0.86)” (p.7). Yet, repeatedly, grit research has supported that, although grit may overlap with the achievement aspects of conscientiousness, it is different because of its emphasis on long-term stamina rather than short-term intensity (Duckworth & Gross, 2014; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Duckworth & Weir, 2011; Duckworth et al., 2007). “The gritty individual not only finishes tasks at hand, but pursues a given aim over years” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p.1089).

Goals, Grit, Abusive Supervision, and LMX

A considerable amount of human behavior is goal-directed (Locke & Latham, 2013). Goal setting has had a major impact on the motivation research conducted over the last 30 years (Latham, 2012). Having already established the relationship between a follower’s career growth potential and their propensity to complete unstructured tasks (i.e., social exchanges) (Graen & Scandura, 1987), long-term career goals may have a significant effect on LMX. Moreover, we have presented compelling evidence based on the construct of grit that demonstrates the connection between long-term, or superordinate, goals, like that of one’s career, and perseverance to reach those goals. Additionally, research supports the notion that gritty people are able to overcome adversity (e.g., abusive supervision) in order to achieve their superordinate goal(s) (Duckworth et al., 2007). In acknowledging the impact of abusive supervision, we suggest that member grittiness may work to mitigate the resulting negatives outcomes, in pursuit of the superordinate goal. More specifically, we propose that grit will act as a moderated moderator of abusive supervision in determining LMX when a member believes there are career growth opportunities (see Figure 2). It is on this premise that we present our third and final proposition:

Proposition 3: Grit will act as a moderated moderator in determining whether a member will partake in social exchanges with a leader, even when a leader demonstrates abusive supervisory behaviors toward the follower, in order to pursue career growth opportunities.

FIGURE 2
PROPOSED MODEL OF LMX WITH GRIT AS MODERATED MODERATOR



IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Implications for this theoretical model are especially valuable to leadership scholars as there is potential for application within broad workplace environments. First, support of this model may suggest that there are some leaders who are unaware of the negative impacts of their abusive supervisory behaviors. Specifically, such leaders would falsely interpret the overall quality of their social exchanges with followers to be the result of their own leadership practice, when in reality these exchanges occur only as a result of the members’ own grittiness and motivation for career advancement. Second, this research may advance knowledge of the potential for grit as a substitute for leadership (for example, see Velez & Neves, 2018) by understanding how it may act as a construct to mitigate adverse workplace experiences, such as abusive supervision. Future research should look to test this model and may also investigate the potential for developing individual grittiness as a coping mechanism within the workplace and perhaps, beyond.

The constructs discussed within this review are well-documented in previous work, meaning a clear next step should involve testing the proposed model using these measurement tools. Perceptions of career growth opportunities may be measured by using the four-item scale originally developed by Bedeian et al. (1991). A sample question from the survey is, “My present job is relevant to my career growth and development in my career.” Nouri and Parker (2013) adapted the measure to a 7-point scale and reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .93. Following the recommendations of Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), LMX-7 may be used to measure LMX because its Cronbach's alpha for the single measure consistently ranged between .80-.90, which was higher than other LMX measures that included additional factors. The LMX-7 is a seven-item survey which uses a standard Likert (5-item) scale for rating responses. A sample question from the LMX-7 is, “How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?” One caveat of LMX research is that it requires dyadic data in which leader and member responses are paired. Based on our own attempts to collect data, we believe there may be difficulty in obtaining accurate responses from followers who fear the real threat of their leader discovering their responses.

Moreover, Tepper’s (2000) abusive supervision construct is designed to assess the degree to which targets (i.e., followers, members) perceive their supervisors to engage in nonphysical abusive behaviors. The measure appears reliable with an alpha score of .94 (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Sample items comprised in this instrument include “my boss ridicules me” and “my boss invades my privacy.” The

responses are rated using a 5-item Likert type scale (Tepper, 2000). Lastly, grit may be measured using the 8-item “Short Grit Scale” or “Grit-S.” This measurement tool displayed acceptable internal consistency with alpha’s ranging from .73 to .83 in the four samples used (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). An example question from the Grit-S is, “I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one” (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). One additional consideration may include measurement of conscientiousness as some critics of grit suggest that these factors are measuring the same construct. To check this, one may employ the six items relating to conscientiousness from the Five-Factor Model Rating Form (FFMRF) (Samuel, Mullins-Sweatt, & Widiger, 2013). The measure “demonstrated defensible convergent and discriminate validity” making the FFMRF a robust measure of the five factor model domains (Samuel et al., 2013, p. 33). Rimfeld and colleagues (2016) reported the measure to be reliable with Cronbach’s alpha of .78 for conscientiousness (Rimfeld et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

We have proposed that although abusive supervision generally has a negative impact on work outcomes (see Schyns & Schilling, 2013), there are potential alternative outcomes moderated by followers’ level of grit, a relatively new concept to the leadership literature. Rooted in motivation and goal theories, grit is a measure of long-term goal commitment and has been shown to predict success in a variety of contexts (Duckworth et al., 2007). Given that grit is a construct measuring how committed one is towards completing a long-term goal, we have proposed that members (i.e., followers) high in grit will be more likely to maintain positive social exchanges with a leader, if doing so will help with attainment of that superordinate goal, even under circumstances where one’s leader is abusive (e.g., blames or ridicules followers). Our model suggests that abusive supervision will act as a moderator on the quality of perceived exchanges between leaders and members when the follower perceives potential career growth opportunities. Furthermore, member grittiness will act as a moderated-moderator of abusive supervision, in that it may allow for the potential mitigation of outcomes associated with destructive leadership (e.g., termination of the leader-member relationship).

This theoretical model could be tested using a correlational (e.g. structural equation model) or experimental research design. Given the differing views of the relationship between the Big Five’s conscientiousness and grit (Rimfeld et al., 2016), it would be advisable to include a measure of conscientiousness in future research exploring relationships between grit, abusive supervision, and LMX. Additionally, although the focus on this proposal has been on abusive supervision, there is potential to extend the theoretical propositions to other negative leadership behaviors, including the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, sub-clinical psychopathology; Volmer, Koch, & Göritz, 2016).

Though the presented model suggests members may overcome abusive supervision, this is not to suggest that abusive supervision should be tolerated in the workplace. When followers have had to overcome leaders who verbally and psychologically abuse them, it would be wise for organizations to determine how leadership may be creating obstacles for employees to perform and what may influence members to persist. Exploring exactly how abusive supervision is overcome provides holistic insight on the leadership process which exists within modern organizations.

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