

# Constructive Deviance, Leader-Member Exchange, and Confidence in Appraisal: How Do They Interrelate, if at All?

## Desviación Constructiva, Intercambio Líder-Miembro y Confianza en la Evaluación: ¿Cómo se Interrelacionan, si lo Hacen?

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**Abstract.** This study examined connections between elements of Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) relationships, trust and confidence in performance appraisal processes, and constructive deviant behavior. The sample consisted of 120 members of a large public service organization. The results support positive connections between the constructs of LMX, confidence in appraisal processes, and constructive deviant behaviors. However, when predicting constructive deviance we found no difference in using confidence in appraisal processes as a single predictor compared to using both confidence in appraisal and LMX. The implications of these results are discussed, and we offer several suggestions for developing research programs dealing with the intersection of LMX, confidence in appraisal processes, and constructive deviant behavior in organizations.

*Key words:* constructive deviance, LMX, appraisal confidence, workplace deviance.

**Resumen.** Este estudio examina las conexiones entre el intercambio líder-miembro (LMX), la confianza en los procesos de evaluación del desempeño y las conductas desviadas constructivas. La muestra fueron 120 miembros de una amplia organización de servicio público. Los resultados apoyan relaciones positivas entre los constructos de LMX, la confianza en los procesos de evaluación y las conductas desviadas constructivas. Sin embargo, en cuanto a la predicción de la desviación constructiva, no se encontraron diferencias entre usar la confianza en los procesos de evaluación como factor individual de predicción y utilizar tanto la confianza en la valoración como LMX. Se discuten las implicaciones de estos resultados y se ofrecen varias sugerencias para el desarrollo de programas de investigación relacionados con la interrelación de LMX, la confianza en los procesos de evaluación y la conducta desviada constructiva en las organizaciones.

*Palabras clave:* desviación constructiva, LMX, confianza en la evaluación, desviación en el trabajo.

Workplace deviance has become an important issue in organizations and is increasingly gaining research attention (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007; Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Dilchert, Ones, Davis, & Rostow, 2007). The collective impact of deviant behaviors on the organization is broad, as organizational deviance has economic, sociological, and psychological implications. For example, the financial cost resulting from theft by employees in the United States is estimated at 50 billion dollars per year (Coffin, 2003). Moreover, employees who have been the target of deviant behaviors, such as verbal harassment or unwelcome physical contact, have a greater tendency to resign, to develop stress-related problems, and to experience low morale (O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996). They also tend to experience low self-

esteem, increased fear, and lack of confidence at work, as well as physical and psychological pain (Griffin, O'Leary, & Collins, 1998). However, because deviant behavior is defined largely on the principle of violating organizational norms (Griffin, et al., 1998), there can be situations where behavior that is deemed deviant by organizations may have positive outcomes for the organization. Thus, along with potential negative outcomes, deviant behaviors of employees can also be functional and constructive. For example, research indicates that violating organizational norms by demonstrating deviant behavior can serve as a source of innovation and creativity, thus contributing to the organization's competitive advantage, as well as to societal wellbeing (Howell & Higgins, 1990; Howell, Shea, & Higgins, 1998; Krau, 2008).

Workplace deviant behaviors can therefore have positive, or *constructive*, and negative, or *destructive*, repercussions. However, although we acknowledge both the constructive and destructive nature of deviant

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behavior, in this paper we shall investigate only constructive deviance.

### Constructive Deviance

Galperin (2002) defined constructive deviance as voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms, consequently contributing to the wellbeing of an organization, its members, or both. We believe that constructive deviance can result in effect long-term organizational change, and in this sense we agree with Sekerka and Fredrickson (2002), who consider wellbeing primarily as a positive individual and organizational state. This state is primarily grounded in a positive social-emotional climate in the workplace that in turn can enhance the physical and psychological health of individuals and can also result in social and economic sustainability for organizations (Sekerka & Fredrickson, 2002).

Despite the fact that the managerial level proscribes these behaviors, such behaviors may ultimately assist the organization in achieving its objectives. These behaviors can be divided into two main categories based on the intended objects of behavior. The first, interpersonal constructive deviance is directed at individuals and comprises behaviors such as disobeying managerial orders in order to improve organizational processes. The second, organizational constructive deviance is directed at the organization and comprises two types of behaviors: innovative behaviors aimed at helping the organization (i.e., finding creative ways to resolve problems) and those that challenge existing norms in order to help the organization (i.e., breaking rules in order to resolve clients' problems). Despite the potential importance of constructive deviance in the organization, the majority of research to date focuses on destructive deviant behaviors. Few empirical studies explored the antecedents of constructive behavior (Galperin & Burke, 2006; Tziner, Goldberg, & Or, 2006). Accordingly, in this study we attempted to delve further into this issue.

One possible antecedent to constructive deviance may be the quality of existing exchange relationships between employees and their managers. Therefore, we chose to examine the theoretical framework that examines the quality of the superior-subordinate relationship, which is Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (Graen & Ohl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Mashyn, 1998).

### LMX

A distinctive feature of the LMX approach is its focus on the dyadic relationship maintained by superiors and their subordinates. Rather than asserting that managers exhibit the same leadership style with all their subordinates, LMX posits that managers develop and maintain unique relationships with different employees.

Employees who enjoy high-LMX with their superiors typically benefit from more opportunities, emotional support, and cooperative interactions in comparison with those maintaining low quality LMX relationships (Liden & Graen, 1980). Substantial research has consistently demonstrated that these relationships impinge upon important subordinate attitudes and behaviors (e.g. Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Weismal- Manor, Tziner, Berger, & Dickstein 2010; Tziner, Shultz, & Fisher, 2008).

As LMX is premised on the notions of social exchange (Blau, 1964) and reciprocity (Adams, 1965), subordinates offered high quality LMX are expected to feel compelled to reciprocate in exchange for the preferential treatment they receive from their manager. According to norms of reciprocity, the positive affect, respect, loyalty, and obligation, characteristic of high-quality LMX, should prompt employees to make more valuable contributions to their organization's viability and effectiveness.

Despite the fact that constructive deviance contradicts the organization's norms, it is nonetheless a voluntary behavior that is often aimed at enhancing the organization's wellbeing. In other words, it may be expected that subordinates who enjoy high-level LMX will "pay back" their managers by engaging in discretionary behavior that benefits their manager and organization, even though it defies the organization's rules and norms (which are perceived as hampering its functioning and effectiveness).

Therefore, it is reasonable to hypothesize a positive association between LMX and constructive deviance, in which high-level LMX employees will exhibit higher levels of constructive deviance in comparison with their low level LMX colleagues (*Hypothesis 1*).

In addition, it is worthy of note that although abundant research has been published not only on the outcomes of LMX but also on its antecedents, there is still room for further investigation of the latter (Weismal et al. 2010). One such antecedent factor may be trust and confidence in the performance appraisal system. It is reasonable to expect that when employees believe that their superiors accurately evaluate their performance, they will develop a high-quality LMX relationship with them.

Drawing on the vast literature devoted to the perceptions of organizational justice and their impact on a variety of feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Ambrose & Schminke, 2009) we may assert that perceptions of the fairness of the performance appraisal process and the accuracy of performance ratings constitute a form of interactional and procedural justice.

Accordingly, if employees believe that the procedures used to evaluate their performance and their resultant performance ratings were fair and truly reflect reality, they will be likely to develop a positive intimate rapport, and high-quality exchanges based on trust and liking (high-quality LMX). Conversely, if the proce-

dures employed to appraise performance and the resultant ratings of these procedures are perceived as unfair, negative feelings may emerge, leading to low-quality LMX. Hence, we hypothesize that individuals' confidence or trust in the performance appraisal is positively linked to LMX, so that employees having high confidence (trust) in the appraisal process and its resultant performance ratings will develop a higher-level LMX than their low-level LMX colleagues. (*Hypothesis II*).

Moreover, Krings, and Facchin (2009) indicate the existence of theoretical models linking justice to organizational deviance. Accordingly, perceived unfairness may lead to resentment, anger, frustration and hostility, fueling antinormative acts (i.e., destructive organizational deviance) in order to eliminate negative emotions (Everton, Jolton, & Mastrangelo, 2007; Greenberg & Alge, 1998). Conversely, we may posit that positive feelings regarding fair treatment—specifically those leading to high confidence and trust in the performance appraisal process and results—may lead to constructive deviance, in other words, willingness to break organizational rules in order to promote the organization's effectiveness.

Consequently, we hypothesize that confidence in the performance appraisal procedures and ratings will be positively associated with constructive deviance; employees who experience fair treatment within the process of performance appraisal, and who consider their performance ratings fair, will tend to be more involved in constructive deviance than their colleagues who experience lack of confidence (mistrust) in the performance appraisal procedures and ratings, (*Hypothesis III*).

## Method

### Participants

The data were collected from 120 employees in a public service organization, of whom 51.7% were men, and 48.3% were women. The respondents were rank-and-file employees (67.5%) and managers (32.5%) in a service providing company. The age range was from 20 to 65 ( $M = 34.88$ ;  $SD = 9.18$ ). With respect to education, 24.2% of employees were high school graduates, 21.7% had some higher education, and 54.2% held a university degree. Tenure in the present organization ranged from 0.5 - 35, with a mean of 7.2 years ( $SD = 8.89$ ).

### Measures

#### Leader-member- exchange (LMX)

Participants were asked to respond to seven items, taken from Tziner, Shultz, and Fisher's (2008) study.

For example: "I like my supervisor as a person"; "My supervisor shows empathy to my needs and problems"; "My supervisor will help me when I am in trouble, even if this will have negative consequences for him/her". Ratings were collected on a six-point Likert type scale that ranged from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (6). The alpha coefficient was 0.73 ( $M = 3.67$ ;  $SD = 0.63$ ).

#### Confidence in the performance appraisal

We examined procedures and accuracy of performance ratings with nine items relating to political considerations in the appraisal process, taken from Tziner, Prince, and Murphy's (1997) Performance Appraisal Questionnaire. The items pertained to the extent to which political considerations play a role in the process of rating formulation. For example: "Supervisors avoid giving low performance rating because they fear violent behavior on the part of the employees"; "Supervisors avoid giving performance ratings that may antagonize employees"; "Supervisors give performance ratings that will make them look good their superiors". Responses to the items were reversed so that a high score on this measure indicated that the respondents perceived the appraisal system as *not* highly charged with political manipulation and distortions, and perceived ratings to be highly accurate, and therefore they had high confidence in it. The internal consistency was  $\alpha = 0.68$  ( $M = 4.13$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ).

#### Constructive deviance

We used 16 items from a translated version of Galperin's (2002) questionnaire for constructive deviance. Participants responded on a 6-point Likert Scale (1 = extremely non-typical; 6 = extremely typical) on the degree each kind of behavior was typical of them. Items comprised, for example, "Report a wrongdoing to co-workers to bring about a positive change"; "I have violated organizational rules in order to solve a customer's problem"; "I have ignored the instructions of my superior in order to improve work processes in my organization". Internal consistency of this measure was  $\alpha = 0.83$  ( $M = 3.09$ ;  $SD = 0.71$ ).

## Results

We report descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations for all variables in the study in Table 1. We note that our analyses for Table 1 are based on 102 observations. This is because 18 participants provided only incomplete responses to the study questionnaire and were thus omitted from the analyses.

Table 1. Descriptive Data and Pearson Correlations among Study Variables (N = 102)

	M	SD	1	2
1. Constructive Deviance	3.09	0.71		
2. LMX	3.67	0.63	.22*	
3. Confidence in the Appraisal	4.13	0.51	.29**	.46**

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

As expected, constructive deviance was moderately and significantly related to both LMX and confidence of appraisal. Furthermore, LMX was strongly and significantly related to confidence in the appraisal. Hence, *Hypotheses I, II, and III* were supported.

In order to examine the joint use of both confidence of appraisal and LMX as predictors of constructive deviance, we proceeded with a hierarchical regression analysis. The results appear in Table 2. We note that as with Table 1, the calculations in Table 2 are based on 102 observations due to incomplete responses to the study questionnaire.

The results indicate that despite being significantly related to constructive deviance, LMX did not contribute a unique significant share to the explained variance in constructive deviance beyond that accounted for by confidence of appraisal. Both Model 1, which includes confidence in appraisal as the single predictor, as well as Model 2, which confidence and LMX as predictors, display Adjusted R Square values of .07.

## Discussion

There are several points of discussion worth noting. First, we are encouraged that constructive deviance was related to both LMX and appraisal confidence in the present study, respectively at  $r = .22$  ( $p < .05$ ) and  $r = .29$  ( $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, that fact that LMX and appraisal confidence were related at  $r = .46$  ( $p < .01$ ) is a finding that calls for further investigation. We are especially interested in further exploring the conceptual bases of this connection between LMX and appraisal

confidence. For example, is this connection driven primarily through the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship, and what paths mediate and/or moderate this connection? Also, we expect there are subtypes or different categories of appraisal confidence that should be considered as separate entities. Given this, we question which aspects of confidence in the appraisal process are most strongly linked to the LMX relationship. We feel it is possible to incorporate the larger scope of the organization's performance management system, which suggest a three part consideration of confidence with appraisal and feedback processes, confidence with developmental aspects of the performance management system, and confidence concerning the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Furthermore, we are interested in considering what parts of LMX theory are most important in respect to these linkages.

Strengths of this study include the identification of potential connections between LMX, constructive deviance, and trust in the performance appraisal system. Also, we are encouraged by the empirical relationships revealed by this study. However, this study is also limited in the following ways.

First, the variability of all relationships is affected by the relatively low sample size within our study. We should see stronger effects between our study variables in larger samples. Also, we expect that other types of relationships between appraisal confidence, LMX, and constructive deviance could be discovered using a larger sample or multiple samples. In particular, we are concerned that within our study there was essentially no difference in predicting constructive deviance from confi-

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Results for Constructive Deviance

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t
Confidence in the appraisal	.28	2.94**	.23	2.15*
LMX			.11	1.01
R <sup>2</sup>	.08		.09	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>			.07	
Model F	8.65**		4.83**	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$  (1-tailed). N= 102

dence in appraisal alone versus confidence in appraisal with LMX. As it conceptually appears that LMX would make a unique contribution above and beyond confidence in appraisal, we hope that evidence for this effect will be seen in future studies with larger samples.

In this regard, we feel the need to investigate a refined model in future research, where instead of examining the joint effects of LMX and confidence in appraisal on constructive deviance, we will examine a full mediated path analysis model (Edwards & Lambert, 2007) to detect potential effects of LMX on constructive deviance. Specifically, we believe that a model which uses confidence in appraisal as a mediating variable between LMX and constructive deviance may provide a useful alternative model. Conceptually, examining these proposed relationships between LMX, confidence in appraisal, and constructive deviance could fulfill the traditional definition of mediation as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986).

A second and related point is the need to conceptually link the relationships between trust perceptions, LMX, and constructive deviance to potential mediating and/or moderating variables, such as key aspects of organizational culture and relevant individual differences. In this sense, particular situational elements such as a culture of high control would have a strong impact on the extent that constructive deviance behaviors would be exhibited by individuals in the organization. Also, certain individuals such as persons high in neuroticism might be less inclined than others to display constructive deviance, while other individuals, such as those open to new ideas (i.e. high in openness) might be more inclined to constructive deviance as a means of expressing the nature of the LMX relationship. As referenced above, the use of the moderated mediation model proposed by Edwards and Lambert (2007) would allow the inclusion of potential individual difference and situational moderators with the ability to detect moderation at various paths within the model.

Another place for future investigation is in the examination of the relationship between confidence in the appraisal and LMX and the interpersonal and organizational subtypes of organizational deviance. Research suggests that although both types of deviant behaviors –those focused on individual targets and those that target the organization– are highly correlated, each type of deviance shows different patterns of relationships with personality traits and contextual performance (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007). Thus, we believe it would be beneficial to investigate this distinction between individual and organization-focused constructive deviance, LMX, and appraisal confidence. For example, would it make sense that LMX would be primarily connected to interpersonal deviance because it is a relationally-based construct? And because the focus of performance management systems is often broad, would confidence and trust in

the performance management system be linked to organizationally-focused deviance rather than interpersonal deviance?

As a general comment, we believe that further model development regarding how confidence in performance appraisal and the overall performance management system needs to be considered. Specifically, it is worth considering the potential paths by which specific expectation beliefs impact constructive deviance intentions and behavior. In addition, there is a need to investigate the different types or dimensions of expectancy beliefs related to performance management systems. Nonetheless, we believe the current study provides a solid point of departure for such future studies, as it offers evidence for several essential connections between confidence in appraisal, LMX, and constructive deviance.

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