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Task Characteristics as a mediator of the LMX-OCB relationship

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## Abstract

The current study investigated the extent to which certain characteristics with job tasks mediate the relationship between leader-member-exchange (LMX) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Data were collected by means of anonymous self-report questionnaires. A total of 168 employees in a Norwegian electronic warehouse participated in the study. LMX was measured by the *LMX-7* scale, which assesses the quality of the social relationship between the leader and the member. OCB was measured by a 24-item scale, which measures five different facets of organizational citizenship behavior. The task characteristic scale included 14 items in total. The findings showed that the task characteristic intrinsically satisfying tasks fully mediated the relationship between LMX and the five OCB dimensions conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy and altruism. Task feedback and routine tasks showed however no mediating effects. Hence, the degree of experienced task satisfaction seems to play an important role in the relationship between LMX quality and employee's willingness to participate in citizenship behavior. The findings suggest that leaders should place great emphasis on enhancing intrinsic satisfaction with job tasks to promote employees' citizenship behavior.

*Keywords:* Leader-member-exchange, organizational citizenship behavior, intrinsic satisfaction, task characteristics, social exchange theory, substitutes for leadership

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## Introduction

This paper is concerned with the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and the possible mediating role of task characteristics. LMX, which is concerned with the quality of the social relationship between a leader and his or her subordinate, has been found to be positively related to subordinate outcomes such as pro-social behavior and extra effort at the workplace, representing the core characteristics of what is known as OCB (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). However, the nature of this relationship is not sufficiently understood or examined: possible mediators in the LMX-OCB relationship have received less attention in the OCB literature (Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006). Hence, the present study answers the call for further research into the nature of the LMX-OCB relationship, by examining one such possible mediator: characteristics with job tasks, or “task characteristics”.

Illustrating his notion of OCB, Organ (1988) drew upon his experience with a coworker’s “helping hand” as he encountered difficulties when performing his assigned work at the local paper mill in his youth. With apparently no self-interest or expected rewards involved, the coworker paused his work to assist Organ perform his task appropriately. Reasoning about the motives and consequences of such behavior, Organ (1988) came up with the following definition of OCB: “... individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (p. 4). Organ (1988) further characterized citizenship behavior as behavior that goes beyond participants subscribed roles and tasks, and takes the form of helping behavior that is both beneficial to fellow employees as well as the organization as a whole. OCB is also referred to as extra-role behavior, where employees “go above and beyond the call of duty” (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1993, p. 261). Organ’s core idea about OCB is that it serves as a link between the less understood relationship between satisfaction and organizational performance (Organ, 1988). By demonstrating how employee satisfaction is tightly connected with citizenship behavior, and how citizenship behavior has a positive effect on organizational

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performance, the author suggested that OCB is the missing link that brings the two constructs together.

Since Organ (1988) first defined the OCB construct in its whole, and proposed some basic antecedents as well as outcomes related to OCB, an array of research testing various relationships with the construct has emerged. Leader behaviors, in particular transformational leadership and LMX leadership, have been widely studied as potential antecedents of OCB (see e.g., Asgari, 2008; Deluga, 1994; Hackett & Lapiere, 2004; Ilies et al., 2007; Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005; Wayne & Green, 1993).

LMX theory focuses on the informal relationship that develops between a leader and his or her subordinate (Wang et al., 2005). LMX relationships involve exchanges of favors and intangible rewards between the leader and the member. Mutual provision of support, help and rewards, combined with mutual trust and felt obligation is what characterizes a high quality LMX relationship (Wang et al., 2005). The leader typically provides the member with valuable work-related information and increased decision latitude, in which the member reciprocates by showing increased effort and commitment towards the organization. It is commonly suggested that OCB represents a mean for the subordinate to reciprocate the support and favors provided by the leader (e.g., Wang et al., 2005; Bahl, 2005; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002; Lapiere & Hackett, 2007). Citizenship behavior, being discretionary and voluntary in nature, becomes a natural mean for the employee for strengthening the social relationship with his or her leader (Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996).

While the positive relationship between LMX and OCB is well documented (Ilies et al., 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2000), “surprisingly little research has examined potential mediators of this (LMX-OCB) relationship” (Organ et al., 2006, p. 105). In the present study attention is given to one such possible mediator; task characteristics<sup>1</sup>. Representing one of Kerr and Jermier’s (1978) “substitutes for leadership”, task characteristics include the three dimensions “routine tasks”, “task feedback” and “intrinsically satisfying tasks”. In their meta-study, Podsakoff et al. (2000) concluded that these three task characteristics have demonstrated strong correlations with OCB, but have nevertheless received little attention in the OCB literature. Representing important antecedents of OCB,

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<sup>1</sup> ”Task characteristics” is referred to in the singular because it refers to a single category

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these task characteristics may also play important roles in the LMX-OCB relationship.

The first objective for the present study is hence to examine the impact of LMX on OCB, and secondly to assess the role of task characteristics as a potential mediator in the LMX-OCB relationship.

## **Theoretical background and hypotheses**

### **Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

As previously demonstrated, OCB represents subordinate behavior that is voluntary and spontaneous, that transcends the behavior required from one's job, and from which the subordinate does not expect any immediate reward or recognition (Organ, 1988). In their original study on OCB, Smith, Organ and Near (1983) identified two main categories of OCB: "Altruism" and "Generalized Compliance". Whereas altruism (or "helping") referred to behavior that benefits a specific person, generalized compliance referred to behavior that supports the overall well-being of the organization. Being a more impersonal form of citizenship behavior, generalized compliance was defined to comprise acts such as complying with rules, norms and expectations. In his 1988 study, Organ replaced the term generalized compliance with "Conscientiousness", since "compliance" "too often connotes servile obedience to authority figures and fails to convey what is just as likely to be inner-directed, even nonconformist in character" (p. 10). Conscientiousness was defined more broadly, as behaviors that go "well beyond the minimum required levels" (Organ, 1988, p. 9). Employees who take on extra work, are punctual, and stay after work in order to finish their tasks demonstrate this kind of citizenship behavior, the author explained. It is however important to note that the term "compliance" is still used by many authors as an equivalent to conscientiousness. Some researchers have further more specifically differentiated citizenship behavior that benefits the organization (OCB-O), from citizenship behavior that benefits a specific individual (OCB-I) (e.g., Williams & Anderson, 1991; Ilies et al., 2007). These researchers have suggested that the OCB dimension altruism belongs to the OCB-I category, and that conscientiousness, or compliance, belongs to the OCB-O category.

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In Organ's 1988 study, OCB was expanded to include three additional dimensions: "courtesy", "sportsmanship", and "civic virtue". Courtesy refers to behavior such as preventing work-related problems for others, and considering the impact of one's work on others' work. Subordinates who face work-related obstacles with a positive attitude, and refrain from complaining over minor issues demonstrate sportsmanship. Finally, employees who show responsibility for the organization, stay updated on organization-relevant news, and attend non-mandatory meetings show civic virtue.

### **Leader-member exchange**

LMX theory has its roots in social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964). SET emphasizes the ongoing exchange of resources and rewards between individuals, in which creates social bonds and long-term relationships. The norm of reciprocity is central in the theory, which may be described as a mechanism where the receiver of a favor or reward becomes obligated to return the favor in the future, or as Blau (1964) states, social exchange is "limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others" (p. 6). Blau (1964) further emphasizes that exchange relationship creates "diffuse obligations": since the value of favors and rewards is difficult to determine, neither what, nor when to reciprocate is clear. In order to maintain a high quality social relationship, both parties must perceive the exchange process as reasonable equitable or fair. Equity theory (Adams, 1965) emphasizes the importance of a balanced give-and-take relationship between the two parties, and predicts that when one party experiences unfairness, he or she will seek to regain the balance by either reducing the contribution in the relationship or by demanding additional rewards from the opposite party.

LMX theory draws further upon the vertical dyad linkage approach (VDL) (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975). VDL was introduced as an alternative approach for understanding the relationship between a superior and his or her subordinate. Instead of focusing on the relationship between the superior and the group as a whole, VDL argues for the necessity of assessing each leader-member relation separately (vertical dyads), since the leader develops unique relationships with each subordinate. Dansereau et al. (1975) drew a distinction between

“supervising” and “leadership”. When leaders perform supervising they simply monitor subordinates’ behavior and provides standard rewards. The subordinate on his hand strictly performs the work as specified in the work contract. Leadership on the other hand, involves frequent personal interaction between the leader and the subordinate. The leader participates in, and supports the subordinate in her work. Leadership thus enables a high-quality social relationship between the leader and the member. The leader’s personal involvement with his subordinates further enables him to have the employees do work that goes beyond the written job contract, which may be highly valuable for the leader. By providing the member with benefits such as increased job latitude, influence in decision-making, and valuable information, the leader can expect that the member takes increased responsibility, exhibits greater effort, and shows commitment to the success of the organization (Dansereau et al., 1975).

Liden and Graen (1980) tested the validity of the VDL model as an approach for understanding leader behaviors. Although the OCB construct had yet to be defined at that time, their findings serve to illuminate the nature of the LMX-OCB relationship. Having concluded that the VDL approach does help to capture the unique and qualitative aspects of leader-member relations, Liden and Graen (1980) made some interesting notes about what characterizes a high quality social exchange relationship. Members in such relationships “carry out tasks that go beyond the written job description” and “a non-written interpersonal contract seems to be negotiated between the leader and the preferred subordinate(s)”, the authors explained (Liden & Graen, 1980, p. 464). The authors showed that actions by the subordinate, such as more communication with members from other units, more involvement in PR activities, and more direct contact with clients were positively related to leader behaviors such as providing job-related feedback, supporting employees’ actions, and showing personal sensitivity towards the subordinates. The subordinate-behaviors here explained are strikingly similar to those operationalized by Organ (1988) as OCB some years later.

### **The relationship between LMX and OCB**

As suggested, it is in relation to social exchange theory that OCB finds its close link to LMX. It is commonly believed that OCB becomes a natural mean

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for the member to reciprocate the favors and support provided by the leader (Hackett & Lapierre, 2007; Settoon et al., 1996). Intangible rewards provided by the leader, such as support, resources, information, and decision latitude, may be reciprocated by the member by showing increased responsibility for the organization, taking on extra work, and helping coworkers. Settoon et al. (1996) explain how OCB represents a valuable mean for social reciprocation:

... citizenship behavior has been viewed as a social resource that may be exchanged by individuals who have been the recipient of social rewards (Foa & Foa, 1980; Moorman, 1991). The discretionary nature of extra-role behavior such as citizenship means they may easily be given or withheld (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Organ, 1988); this makes them ideal wares for reciprocation. (p. 220)

In a similar manner, Organ (1990) explains how OCB may be used to rebalance the social exchange relationship when the member experiences unfairness in the give-and-take relationship:

Once the threshold for perception of unfairness in social exchange is breached, and the relationship with the organization is redefined in terms of economic exchange, a "controlled" regulation of OCB comes into play. Gestures of OCB that might otherwise have been proffered in unconstrained fashion are withheld or extracted grudgingly. (p. 67)

Among the studies supporting the hypothesized relationship between LMX and OCB are Ilies et al.'s meta-study (2007), which showed a moderately strong and positive correlation between LMX and OCB ( $\rho = .37$ ), and the meta-study by Podsakoff et al. (2000), which demonstrated a similar positive correlation between LMX and a composite score of OCB ( $\rho = .30$ ). However, compared to other outcomes of LMX, such as task performance, satisfaction with the leader and commitment, researchers "have less understanding of how LMX is related to citizenship behavior" (Ilies et al., 2007, p. 270). As such, possible mediators in the LMX-OCB relationship need increased attention.

The previously mentioned distinction between OCB-I and OCB-O, the former representing citizenship behavior that benefits an immediate person, and the latter representing citizenship behavior that is targeted at the organization, has been found to correlate differently with LMX. The general finding is that LMX is

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more closely related to OCB-I (represented by altruism) than to OCB-O (represented by compliance or conscientiousness). Wayne and Green (1993) and Truckenbrodt (2000) both found a significant and positive relationship between LMX and altruism, but not with compliance. Moreover, in their meta-study, Ilies et al. (2007) reported that LMX predicted individual-targeted OCB (defined as altruism and courtesy) to a significantly larger degree than it predicted organizational-targeted OCB (defined as conscientiousness and civic virtue).

### **Task Characteristics**

The theoretical basis for task characteristics is Kerr and Jermier's (1978) paper on substitutes for leadership. The authors showed how certain characteristics of the organization, employees, and tasks strongly affected individuals' motivation and performance, and argued that leadership may in some situations be of less importance than previously assumed. Kerr and Jermier (1978) defined the term "substitute" as "a person or thing acting or used in place of another" (p. 395). The authors argued that when certain substitutes are in play they might act to negate the leader's attempts to influence his or her subordinates. The strong influence that substitutes such as individual traits, and a job task's nature have on employees' motivation and satisfaction involves that leadership not only becomes impossible, but also unnecessary, the authors proposed. Concrete examples of substitutes are individual dispositions such as "need for independence" and "professional orientation" (Kerr & Jermier, 1978). These individual dispositions were proposed to greatly reduce the effects of "relationship-oriented" and "supportive" leadership on subordinates.

Kerr and Jermier's (1978) definition of the substitute "task characteristics" draw partly upon Hackman and Oldham's (1976) Job Characteristic Model (JCM). The JCM focuses on a task's own ability to stimulate to employee motivation. JCM includes five core task characteristics, which through their effect on certain psychological states foster employee satisfaction and motivation. The task characteristics "skill variety", "task identity", and "task significance" are proposed to foster the psychological state "experienced meaningfulness". Skill variety refers to the degree to which a job involves a variety of activities, and hence requires the use of different skills and talents by the individual. Task identity refers to the degree to which a task represents a whole, and identifiable

piece of work. Finally, task significance refers to the degree to which one's task has an effect on the lives or work of others. The task characteristic "task autonomy", defined as the degree to which task execution is dependent on the individual's own efforts, initiatives and decisions, is proposed to foster the psychological state "experienced responsibility". Finally, "task feedback", "the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance" (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p. 258), should have a positive effect on the psychological state "knowledge of results".

Kerr and Jermier's (1978) definition of task characteristics include the degree to which the task is 1) unambiguous and routine, and methodologically invariant, whether it 2) provides its own feedback concerning accomplishment, and 3) is intrinsically satisfying. According to Kerr and Jermier, the task characteristic "routine tasks"<sup>2</sup> "may result from serial interdependence, from machine-paced operations, or from work methods that are highly standardized" (p. 379). Hackman and Oldham's (1976) definition of skill variety (using different personal skills), and task identity (completing a whole, identifiable task) seems to be obvious counterparts of routine tasks. Kerr and Jermier's (1978) task characteristic "task feedback" is defined in the same way as Hackman and Oldham (1976), and refers to "performance feedback provided by the work itself" (Kerr & Jermier, 1978, p. 379). The final task characteristic, "intrinsically satisfying tasks"<sup>3</sup>, is not defined precisely by the authors, but refers to the degree to which executing a task is experienced as satisfying and enjoyable, or as Organ et al. (2006) states: a task's "capacity to produce satisfaction and stimulate task involvement" (p. 110). This particular task characteristic is not included in Hackman and Oldham's JCM (1976).

Kerr and Jermier (1978) specifically argued that task provided feedback concerning accomplishment, and unambiguous, routine, and methodologically invariant tasks will act as substitutes for task-oriented and instrumental leadership, while intrinsically satisfying tasks will act as a substitute for relationship-oriented and supportive leadership.

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<sup>2</sup> "Routine tasks" is referred to in the singular because it refers to a single scale

<sup>3</sup> "Intrinsically satisfying tasks" is referred to in the singular because it refers to a single scale

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**Task characteristic – OCB relationship**

Although the mechanisms by which LMX has its effect on OCB are less understood, research has revealed some mediation effects in this relationship. Among research reporting mediation effects are the study by Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1993), which revealed that perceived fairness and job satisfaction completely mediated the relationship between LMX and the OCB dimensions courtesy and civic virtue. Bahl (2005) reported that procedural and interpersonal fairness had important mediating effects in the LMX-OCB relationship, and Hackett and Lapierre (2004) found that job satisfaction and organizational commitment partially mediated the LMX-OCB relationship.

The present study examines the possible mediating role of task characteristics in this particular relationship. In the following I will firstly argue how task characteristics may have a direct impact on OCB, and secondly how task characteristics and LMX may be associated.

Task characteristics seem to play an important role for citizenship behavior. The impact of the three task characteristics (routine tasks, task feedback and intrinsically satisfying tasks) on OCB was examined in the meta-study by Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Bommer (1996). The study showed that the task characteristics explained more of the variance in all the five OCB dimensions (conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism) than did “transformational leader behaviors”. The authors reported that task feedback had direct positive effects on civic virtue; routine tasks had negative effects on all OCB dimensions; and intrinsically satisfying tasks had positive effects on altruism and sportsmanship. These findings support previous findings by Podsakoff, Niehoff, Mackenzie and Williams (1993), which demonstrated rather strong direct effects of the three task characteristics on altruism and conscientiousness; in particular of intrinsically satisfying tasks and routine tasks. Finally, in their meta-analysis, Podsakoff et al. (2000) reported even larger effects of the task characteristics on OCB than did Podsakoff et al. (1996): task feedback and intrinsically satisfying tasks were positively related to all the OCB dimensions, while routine tasks was negatively related to all dimensions. Concluding from these findings, the authors note that:

Task variables also appear to be consistently related to a wide variety of

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organizational citizenship behaviors, although little attention has been given to them in the OCB literature ... This is interesting because it suggests a whole new category of antecedents that has not been previously considered. (p. 532)

### **Task characteristic – LMX relationship**

In their study, Kerr and Jermier (1978) proposed that intrinsically satisfying tasks will act as a substitute for people-centered and supportive leadership. By substituting, the authors meant that a leader's attempts to exert influence over his or her employees become both impossible and unnecessary. The authors explained how deep involvement in tasks makes employees less receptive to leader behaviors, and reported how a research participant "does seem happy in her work despite the erratic attempts at warmth and collegiality displayed by her superior" (Kerr & Jermier, 1978, p. 387). The authors proposed that a satisfying task might simply direct individuals' attention away from the leader towards the task at hand. Although LMX as a construct had yet to be clearly defined at the time of Kerr and Jermier's study, it seems obvious that LMX leadership resembles relationship-oriented leadership. The fact that the task characteristic intrinsically satisfying tasks has been found to be strongly related to OCB, combined with Kerr and Jermier's (1978) proposition that intrinsically satisfying tasks will substitute for relationship-oriented leadership, suggests that individuals might engage in citizenship behavior despite having a poor social exchange relationship with their leader. This emphasizes the importance of considering this specific task variable when examining the LMX-OCB relationship. Failing to do so might result in biased results.

Conclusively, previous research suggests that task characteristics may be significantly associated with both OCB and LMX, and hence including them as mediators may provide new insights into the nature of the LMX-OCB relationship. The present study's hypotheses thus becomes:

*H1: The task characteristic "routine tasks" mediates the relationships between LMX and the five OCB dimensions conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism.*

*H2: The task characteristic "task feedback" mediates the relationships*

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*between LMX and the five OCB dimensions conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism.*

*H3: The task characteristic “intrinsically satisfying tasks” mediates the relationship between LMX and the five OCB dimensions conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism.*

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The present study's sample consisted of employees working in a Norwegian electronic warehouse. The survey was distributed to a total of 465 employees via e-mail using a web-based tool (Confermit). A total of 168 participants completed the questionnaire, which constitutes a response rate of 36%. The sample consisted of 77% men and 23% women with an average age of 30, years ranging from 18 to 57. Of the participants, 10% had lower secondary school (1-9 years) as their highest education; 61% upper secondary school (10-12 years); 26% university/ college (13-16 years); and 3% university (16+ years). Most of the employees worked full-time (96%), and 4% worked part-time. The majority of the employees had a tenure time of 1-5 years (59%), followed by 5-10 years (32%). The largest represented work sector was sales and customer service (72%), followed by transportation, logistics and warehouse (15%). A rather large share of the participants had leader positions (68%), while 10% of the participants were employee representatives. Finally, 88% of the participants had men as their immediate supervisor, while 12% had women. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1 in Appendix A.

### **Measures**

*Leader-Member-Exchange.* LMX was assessed using the seven-item scale (*LMX-7*) obtained from Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995). The scale measures the quality of the relationship between leaders and followers based on three dimensions:

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respect, trust, and obligation. Examples of items are: “How well does your superior understand your job problems and needs?”, and “How likely is it that your superior will help you solve your work-related problems?”. The respondents rated each of the seven items on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, ranging from “not a bit” to “a great deal”, or from “rarely” to “very often”. In the present study, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was .91, demonstrating satisfactory scale reliability.

*Organizational Citizenship Behavior.* OCB was measured using a 24-item scale developed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990), which includes the following five dimensions: conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism. Examples of items are: “My job-effort exceeds the standard level”, and “I do not take extra breaks”. Scale ratings were made of a 5-point Likert scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). In the current study, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for these five dimensions were .59, .74, .73, .65, and .74 respectively, where conscientiousness and courtesy were somewhat lower than the recommended level of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2007). An aggregate score for all the five OCB dimensions was computed and labeled “overall OCB”. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for overall OCB was .84.

*Task Characteristics.* Task characteristics were assessed using the *Revised Substitutes for Leadership Scale* developed by Podsakoff et al. (1993), which includes the following three dimensions: routine tasks, task feedback, and intrinsically satisfying tasks. The three task characteristics' scales counted 14 items in total. Examples of items are: “Most of my work are rather repetitive in nature” (routine tasks), “My job provides me with good opportunities to determine how well I perform” (task feedback), and “My job provides me with great pleasure” (intrinsically satisfying tasks). Scale ratings were made of a 5-point Likert scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  were .84 for routine tasks, .78 for task feedback, and .90 for intrinsically satisfying tasks, demonstrating satisfactory scale reliability.

## **Analyses**

Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science 19.0. Frequency, reliability, and correlation analyses were employed on all the study's variables, and multiple regression analyses were conducted in order

to test the study's hypotheses. The level of significance was set to .05. The mediator analysis was performed by following the three steps recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). The Sobel test for significance of indirect effects was used to test the possible mediating role of task characteristics.

(<http://www.danielsoper.com/statcalc3/calc.aspx?id=31>). In order to reveal possible gender differences within the sample, independent t-test was performed. Due to gender skewness in the study's sample (23% women), nonparametric Chi-square test was also used.

Exploratory factor analysis showed that the items used to assess OCB loaded onto five factors, confirming the validity of the OCB scale by Podsakoff et al. (1990). Varimax rotation and Promax rotation showed the same factor structure. Factor analysis was also performed on the LMX scale and task characteristics scale. All items loaded onto their intended factors, however, one overlapping item (cross-loading) was detected in the "intrinsically satisfying tasks" scale, and hence removed.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations of the research variables. As shown, LMX correlated positively with sportsmanship ( $r=.24, p<.01$ ), civic virtue ( $r=.17, p<.05$ ), courtesy ( $r=.23, p<.01$ ), altruism ( $r=.18, p<.05$ ), as well as overall OCB ( $r=.28, p<.01$ ). LMX was however not significantly related to conscientiousness ( $r=.13, p>.05$ ). These results revealed the existence of a positive relationship between LMX and the majority of the OCB dimensions. Next, task feedback and intrinsically satisfying tasks both showed positive relationships with LMX (both  $r=.39, p<.01$ ). Routine tasks was however not significantly related to LMX ( $r=-.07, p>.05$ ).

Among the task characteristics, routine tasks correlated negatively with sportsmanship ( $r=-.22, p<.01$ ). No relationships existed between routine tasks and the remaining OCB dimensions or overall OCB. Task feedback correlated positively with sportsmanship and overall OCB ( $r=.17$  and  $.16$  respectively, both  $p<.05$ ), but showed no significant correlations with conscientiousness, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism. Finally, intrinsically satisfying tasks was positively related to all the OCB dimensions; conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism, as well as to overall OCB ( $r=.31, .32, .36, .27, .22$ , and  $.43$

respectively, all  $p < .01$ ). Significant correlations were also obtained between the three task characteristics. Intrinsically satisfying tasks was negatively related to routine tasks ( $r = -.39, p < .01$ ), and positively related to task feedback ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). No relationship existed however between task feedback and routine tasks.

Age correlated negatively with routine tasks ( $r = -.16, p < .05$ ), and positively with sportsmanship ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), while gender correlated positively with LMX ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), and negatively with conscientiousness ( $r = -.19, p < .05$ ). The Chi-square test showed however no significant gender differences with regards to these variables.

Table 1

*Mean, standard deviations, and correlations for the measured variables*

Variables	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Age	30.11	7.90	-											
2. Gender	1.23	.42	-.08	-										
3. LMX	3.38	.89	-.01	.19*	(.91)									
4. Routine Tasks	3.26	.84	-.16*	.14	-.07	(.84)								
5. Task Feedback	3.80	.76	.03	.09	.39**	.11	(.79)							
6. Intrinsically S. Tasks	3.79	.80	.12	.04	.39**	-.39**	.33**	(.90)						
7. Conscientiousness	4.15	.54	.10	-.19*	.13	-.09	.12	.31**	(.59)					
8. Sportsmanship	4.13	.59	.19*	.04	.24**	-.22**	.17*	.32**	.29**	(.74)				
9. Civic Virtue	3.87	.63	.03	.02	.17*	-.13	.04	.36**	.24**	.19*	(.73)			
10. Courtesy	4.28	.42	-.02	.02	.23**	-.05	.15	.27**	.40**	.29**	.30**	(.65)		
11. Altruism	4.20	.51	-.03	.04	.18*	.01	.05	.22**	.37**	.32**	.40**	.60**	(.74)	
12. Overall OCB	4.14	.36	.09	-.02	.28**	-.15	.16*	.43**	.68**	.64**	.61**	.72**	.77**	(.84)

Notes: Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients are on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , two-tailed, men=1, women=2, N=168.

Hierarchical regression analyses were employed to examine the relationship between LMX and the individual OCB dimensions. Separate analyses were conducted for each LMX-OCB relations, with age and gender included as control variables (shown only in the first regression equation). As shown in Table 2, after controlling for age and gender, LMX significantly predicted OCB on all dimensions: overall OCB ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ), conscientiousness ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ), sportsmanship ( $\beta = .24, p < .01$ ), civic virtue ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ), courtesy ( $\beta = .24, p < .01$ ), and altruism ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ). Further, LMX explained 9% of the variance in overall OCB, 7% in conscientiousness,

10% in sportsmanship, 3% in civic virtue, 6% in courtesy, and 3% in altruism.

The results demonstrate that the higher in quality the exchange relationship between the leader and the member, the more willing employees were to engage in OCB, supporting previous findings about a positive relationship between LMX and OCB.

Table 2

*Direct effects of LMX on OCB dimensions*

Step	Independent variable	$\beta$	$R^2$	F	Dependent variable
1	Age	.09	.01	.71	Overall OCB
	Gender	-.02			
2	Age	.09	.09	5.43***	Overall OCB
	Gender	-.07			
	LMX	.29***			
2	LMX	.17*	.07	4.28**	Conscientiousness
2	LMX	.24**	.10	5.80***	Sportsmanship
2	LMX	.17*	.03	1.66	Civic Virtue
2	LMX	.24**	.06	3.21*	Courtesy
2	LMX	.18*	.03	1.90	Altruism

Hierarchical multiple regression was used.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed,  $N = 168$ .

Table 3 shows the direct effects of task characteristics on OCB after controlling for age and gender. As seen, routine tasks had a significant and negative effect on the OCB dimension sportsmanship ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but no effects on the remaining dimensions. Task feedback significantly predicted the dimension sportsmanship and overall OCB (both  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Intrinsically satisfying tasks showed a strong and positive relationship with overall OCB ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and moderately strong and positive relationships with the remaining dimensions; conscientiousness ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ ), sportsmanship ( $\beta = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ ), civic virtue ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ ), courtesy ( $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and altruism ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In order to control for mutual influence between the task variables, each equation included the opposite task variables as control variables. The task variables did not significantly affect each other, and these analyses are therefor

not presented in the model. The control variable gender obtained significant and negative regression coefficients in all three task-conscientiousness relationships (routine tasks  $\beta=-.18, p<.05$ ; task feedback and intrinsically satisfying tasks both  $\beta=-.20, p<.01$ ). Similarly, age obtained significant and positive coefficients in all three task-sportsmanship relationships (routine tasks  $\beta=.17$ ; task feedback  $\beta=.19$ ; intrinsically satisfying tasks  $\beta=.16$ , all  $p<.05$ ).

Table 3

*Direct effects of task characteristics on OCB dimensions*

Step	Independent Variable	$\beta$	$R^2$	F	Dependent variable
1	Age	.09	.01	.71	Overall OCB
	Gender	-.02			
2	Age	.07	.03	1.53	Overall OCB
	Gender	.00			
	Routine Tasks	-.14			
2	Routine Tasks	-.06	.05	2.80*	Conscientiousness
2	Routine Tasks	-.21**	.08	4.90**	Sportsmanship
2	Routine Tasks	-.13	.02	.96	Civic Virtue
2	Routine Tasks	-.06	.00	.24	Courtesy
2	Routine Tasks	-.00	.00	.11	Altruism
2	Task Feedback	.16*	.03	1.85	Overall OCB
2	Task Feedback	.14	.06	3.73*	Conscientiousness
2	Task Feedback	.16*	.07	3.77*	Sportsmanship
2	Task Feedback	.04	.00	.16	Civic Virtue
2	Task Feedback	.15	.02	1.30	Courtesy
2	Task Feedback	.05	.00	.23	Altruism
2	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.43***	.19	12.91***	Overall OCB
2	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.31***	.14	8.74***	Conscientiousness
2	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.30***	.13	8.14***	Sportsmanship
2	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.36***	.13	8.14***	Civic Virtue
2	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.28***	.08	4.45**	Courtesy
2	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.22**	.05	2.93*	Altruism

Hierarchical multiple regression was used.

\* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$ , two-tailed,  $N=168$ .

In testing the mediation effects, the three-step regression procedure as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) was used to determine whether or not the

three task characteristics mediate the relationship between LMX and the OCB dimensions. To establish a mediation effect, three conditions must hold: (1) The independent variable (LMX) significantly impacts the mediator (task characteristics); (2) The independent variable (LMX) significantly impacts the dependent variable (OCB); and (3) When the mediator (task characteristics) is included in the regression equation, that is, when OCB is regressed on both the independent (LMX) and mediator variable (task characteristics), the impact of the independent variable (LMX) on the dependent variable (OCB) either becomes insignificant (full mediation) or less significant (partial mediation), and the mediator (task characteristics) significantly impacts the dependent variable (OCB).

As shown in Table 4, LMX did not significantly predict the dependent variable routine tasks ( $\beta = -.09, p > .05$ ). Accordingly, the first condition for a mediation effect is not met. The following analysis thus focuses only on task feedback and intrinsically satisfying tasks, on which LMX obtained strong and positive Beta values ( $\beta = .39$ , and  $.40$  respectively, both  $p < .001$ ). As table 2 shows, LMX significantly predicted all OCB dimensions, hence fulfilling the second condition for a mediation effect.

Table 4

*Direct effects of LMX on task variables*

Step	Independent Variable	$\beta$	$R^2$	F	Dependent variable
1	Age	-.15	.04	3.44*	Routine Tasks
	Gender	.12			
2	Age	-.15	.05	2.78*	Routine Tasks
	Gender	.14			
	LMX	-.09			
2	LMX	.39***	.16	10.08***	Task Feedback
2	LMX	.40***	.17	10.97***	Intrinsically S Tasks

Hierarchical multiple regression was used.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed, N=168.

Table 5 shows the OCB dimensions regressed on both the independent variable (LMX) and the mediator variables (task characteristics). Task feedback

showed no significant regression coefficients in either equation, hence it does not serve as a mediator in any of the LMX-OCB relationships. Also, when controlling for the other task characteristics, task feedback did not obtain significant regression coefficients. Intrinsically satisfying tasks however, completely mediated all the LMX-OCB relationships, demonstrated by the LMX regression coefficients becoming insignificant in all equations, as well as the coefficients of intrinsically satisfying tasks are high and significant: overall OCB ( $\beta=.38, p<.001$ ), conscientiousness ( $\beta=.29, p<.001$ ), sportsmanship ( $\beta=.25, p<.01$ ), civic virtue ( $\beta=.35, p<.001$ ), courtesy ( $\beta=.22, p<.01$ ), and altruism ( $\beta=.18, p<.05$ ). When controlling for the other task characteristics, the regression coefficients for intrinsically satisfying tasks stays at similar high and significant levels. The Sobel test also showed that the mediating effects of intrinsically satisfying tasks was significant ( $P<.001$  in all relationships). Taken together, LMX and intrinsically satisfying tasks explained 21% of the variance in overall OCB, 14% in conscientiousness, 15% in sportsmanship, 13% in civic virtue, 9% in courtesy, and 6% in altruism.

Conclusively, hypothesis 3, which predicted a mediation effect of intrinsically satisfying tasks, was supported. Hypotheses 1 and 2, which predicted mediation effects of routine tasks and task feedback were not supported.

Table 5

*Mediator effects of task characteristics in the relationship between LMX and OCB dimensions*

Step	Independent Variable	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	F	Dependent variable
1	Age	.09	.01	-.00	.71	Overall OCB
	Gender	-.02				
2	Age	.09	.09	.07	5.43***	Overall OCB
	Gender	-.07				
	LMX	.29***				
3	Age	.09*	.09	.07	4.17**	Overall OCB
	Gender	-.07				
	LMX	.27***				
	Task Feedback	.05				
3	LMX	.13	.08	.06	3.49**	Conscientiousness
	Task Feedback	.09				
3	LMX	.21*	.10	.08	4.56**	Sportsmanship
	Task Feedback	.08				
3	LMX	.18*	.03	.01	1.26	Civic Virtue
	Task Feedback	-.03				
3	LMX	.21*	.06	.04	2.59*	Courtesy
	Task Feedback	.07				
3	LMX	.19*	.03	.01	1.44	Altruism
	Task Feedback	-.03				
3	LMX	.14	0.21	.19	10.69***	Overall OCB
	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.38***				
3	LMX	.06	0.14	.12	6.65***	Conscientiousness
	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.29***				
3	LMX	.14	.15	.13	6.98***	Sportsmanship
	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.25**				
3	LMX	.03	.13	.11	6.12***	Civic Virtue
	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.35***				
3	LMX	.15	.09	.07	4.25**	Courtesy
	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.22**				
3	LMX	.11	.06	.04	2.63*	Altruism
	Intrinsically S. Tasks	.18*				

Hierarchical multiple regression and the Sobel test for indirect effects were used.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed, N=168.

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## Discussion

The present study revealed a positive relationship between LMX and the five OCB dimensions conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism. The strength of the correlation between LMX and overall OCB is similar to the findings reported in Podsakoff et al.'s (2000) meta-study. Regression analysis showed that LMX quality significantly predicted OCB on all dimensions. It seems that a high quality LMX relationship do promote employee citizenship, and that the effect varies according to the different forms of citizenship behavior. Sportsmanship, represented by behaviors such as not complaining about trivial matters, and showing resilience when facing work-related obstacles, and courtesy, representing behaviors such as preventing work-related problems for others, and sharing important information, seem to be slightly more likely outcomes of a high quality social relationship between a leader and the member. The fact that LMX did not predict altruism to any larger degree than it predicted conscientiousness ( $\beta = .18$ , and  $.17$  respectively, both  $p < .05$ ) is somewhat contradictive to previous findings (Ilies et al., 2007; Wayne & Green, 1993; Truckenbrodt, 2000). As the present study's results demonstrate, citizenship behavior that benefits a specific individual (altruism – OCB-I) does not seem to be a more likely outcome of a high quality exchange relationship than citizenship behavior that benefits the overall well-being of the organization (conscientiousness – OCB-O), as was reported in the studies by Ilies et al. (2007), Wayne & Green (1993), and Truckenbrodt (2000).

The current findings support the proposition that citizenship behavior represents a mean for employees to reciprocate the positive experiences derived from a high quality relationship with the leader. Citizenship behavior, such as providing support and help to coworkers, and acting in the best interest of the organization, should obviously be highly appreciated by the leader. The leader might further reciprocate citizenship behavior by providing his or her subordinate with increased support, valuable information, and decision latitude. A give-and-take relationship is thus established between the leader and the member. By continually reciprocating each other's favors and rewards, in a manner that ensures a balanced and equitable exchange system, a long-term LMX relationship is established.

The present study has further demonstrated that task characteristics have

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significant direct effects on the OCB dimensions. Tasks that are experienced as intrinsically satisfying have a particular strong impact on the degree to which employees display any form of OCB. All Beta values were larger than those obtained when regressing the OCB dimensions on LMX, which suggests that intrinsically satisfying tasks has a stronger direct impact on OCB than does the quality of leader-member relationships. The importance of satisfying tasks thus exceeds the importance of this particular leadership behavior when it comes to promoting OCB. This finding represents a new and important dimension to be considered in future research on the LMX-OCB relationship.

We might suggest that individuals who are genuinely interested in their tasks might find pleasure in helping others with work related problems, and be willing to share task-related knowledge. Moreover, one might think that satisfying tasks have a positive effect on individuals' mood, and hence make them more prone to provide help to others and face work related obstacles with a positive attitude.

Routine tasks were further found to have a significant and negative effect on sportsmanship. Accordingly, an increase in experiences of task routinization should result in employees complaining more, and showing resistance when encountering work related difficulties. Unlike intrinsically satisfying tasks, one might think that routine tasks provide little inspiration and motivation to the employee, and as such leave him or her with little extra energy to endure problems and difficulties.

Finally, task feedback showed a weak, but significant and positive effect on overall OCB and sportsmanship. This suggests that when employees obtain clear results related to task performance they are more likely to participate in OCB in general, and in sportsmanship in particular. Interestingly, sportsmanship is the only OCB outcome that is shared among the three task variables, not conscientiousness or altruism, which are considered the most common forms of OCB. The lack of significant correlations between routine tasks and OCB and task feedback and OCB are somewhat surprising, considering the meta-analysis by Podsakoff et al. (2000) that revealed moderately strong correlations between all the three task characteristics and all the OCB dimensions.

The present study also revealed significant correlations among the task variables. The moderately strong and positive correlation between task feedback and intrinsically satisfying tasks suggests that a task that provides clear results

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concerning accomplishment play a role in the degree to which the task is experienced as intrinsically satisfying. Moreover, the moderately strong and negative correlation found between intrinsically satisfying tasks and routine tasks suggests that tasks that are experienced as repetitive and unambiguous have low potential to produce task satisfaction. We might suggest that tasks that are easily quantifiable, and demand the use of a variety of skills, have greater potential to produce intrinsic satisfaction, as also proposed in Hackman and Oldham's (1976) JCM.

An important finding in this study concerns the moderately strong correlation found between task feedback and LMX. Although task feedback is supposed to measure performance feedback provided the task itself, it seems that the leader also plays a role in the degree to which an employee experiences performance feedback. The leader might obviously also represent a source for feedback related to employees' work progress.

The current study's hypothesis was related to the mediating effects of task characteristics. Intrinsically satisfying tasks was found to be the only task characteristic that served as a mediator in the various LMX-OCB relationships. The task characteristic fully mediated all the six relationship (overall OCB, as well as the five dimensions). This suggests that intrinsically satisfying tasks represent a prerequisite for LMX to have an effect on OCB. Without sufficient interest in one's tasks, efforts by the leader to enhance citizenship behavior thus become less effective.

The present study's findings might be said to provide support for Kerr and Jermier's (1978) proposition that intrinsically satisfying tasks serve as a substitute for relationship-oriented leadership. The task characteristic does indeed fulfill the conditions for being a substitute. As specified by Podsakoff et al. (1996), these conditions are: the leader behavior (LMX) must have a significant effect on the criterion (OCB); the substitute (intrinsically satisfying tasks) must *weaken* the leader behavior-criterion relationship; and the substitute must have a significant main effect on the criterion in the same direction as the leader behavior. Only when these conditions are met "can it be said that the variable both weakens the impact of the leader's behavior on the criterion variable and also replaces, or "substitutes" for it." (Podsakoff et al., 1996, 281).

I will argue however that the present study only provides support for the "weakening" effect of LMX on OCB. An interesting and enjoyable task that

subsumes one's attention might obviously make the employee less vulnerable to leader behaviors. As the main driver for work effort is the task itself, it may matter less whether the leader is supportive and helpful, or not. As such, it seems plausible that the employee will demonstrate citizenship behavior despite having a low-quality LMX relationship with her leaders. A complete "replacement" effect, that is, an elimination of leadership influence, is however less likely to occur. The relatively strong correlation found between LMX quality and intrinsically satisfying tasks suggests that the personal relationship between the leader and the member plays a role in the degree to which the task is experienced as intrinsically satisfying. A leader's provision of decision latitude, valuable information, and support may increase the enjoyment in carrying out one's work tasks. Moreover, the positive correlation obtained between task satisfaction and task feedback suggests that performance feedback provided by the leader also impacts intrinsic satisfaction (given that task feedback also reflects feedback from the leader). In this manner, we might conclude that the combination of a high quality LMX relationship and satisfying tasks is a powerful determinant of citizenship behavior.

Intrinsic satisfaction from task execution may be related to a variety of factors. According to Albert Bandura (1997), satisfaction and motivation is driven to a large degree by feelings of self-determination and mastery. Self-determination, or autonomy, may be important factors for obtaining intrinsic satisfaction from tasks. Freedom to design one's work tasks, and increased decision latitude may stimulate feelings of self-determination. This emphasizes the importance of providing such resources to the member in a LMX relationship.

Intrinsically satisfying tasks might further be a source for intrinsic *motivation*, that is, motivation driven by an inner desire to perform well. Amabile (1996) explains how satisfying tasks is an important determinant of intrinsic motivation: "Intrinsic motivation is driven by deep interest and involvement in the work, by curiosity, enjoyment, or a personal sense of challenge" (p. 7). Moreover, intrinsic motivation is found to be positively related to organizational citizenship behavior, or more specifically, to helping behavior that exceeds the formal job demands (Kuvaas, 2008). As such, task satisfaction seems to be a valuable source for promoting OCB.

Amabile (1988) argues that intrinsic motivation is particularly important for individuals whose work is characterized by quality, learning, and innovation. Intrinsic motivation should thus be essential for individuals working with research

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and development, and with knowledge-products in general. Deep interest and involvement in tasks is obviously necessary in order to execute work that is highly complex. The quality of the relationship with one's leader might become less relevant for professional workers. However, leaders might still play an important role for ensuring intrinsic motivation. Professional workers, who possess unique and extensive task knowledge, might demand a high degree of autonomy and freedom in their jobs. The leader's role might therefore become to facilitate the working conditions in accordance with the workers' needs and wishes, rather than providing instructions and defining task operations. A leader's ability to foster inspiration and motivation among the workers might further be important for stimulating task involvement and interest in one's work.

The fact that task feedback did not show any mediating effects in the LMX-OCB relationships implies that LMX quality has a significant effect on citizenship behavior also when tasks are experienced as providing little performance-related feedback. It is somewhat surprising however that this task characteristic, which arguably should be an important determinant for feelings of mastery and self-efficacy, did not play a significant role in the relationship between LMX and OCB. On the other hand, feedback related to task execution might, as has been argued, stem from the leader herself. If the leader provides sufficient task feedback it might matter less if the task itself provides few cues related to progress.

The degree of experienced task routinization did also not significantly affect the LMX-OCB relationships. As with task feedback, it seems that the positive effect of a good leader-member relationship on OCB prevails even when tasks are experienced as monotonous and repetitive. The fact that routine tasks and task feedback did not serve as mediators support Kerr and Jermier's (1978) propositions about these task variables' substituting properties. Task feedback and routine tasks were suggested to substitute for transactional and instrumental leadership, but not for supportive and relationship-oriented leadership (such as LMX). Accordingly, these task characteristics' impact on the LMX-OCB relationship should be less significant.

An important issue related to our findings concerns the relationship between intrinsically satisfying tasks and job satisfaction. Organ et al. (2006) suggested that all the three task characteristics might have their impact on OCB through job satisfaction, and in particular intrinsically satisfying tasks:

“Obviously, tasks that possess this property would be expected to influence OCB through their impact on employee job satisfaction” (p. 110). Podsakoff et al. (1993) tested the effects of various substitutes for leadership on a diverse set of employee outcomes and found that intrinsically satisfying was the strongest predictor of what they labeled “general satisfaction”. One might therefore suggest that intrinsically satisfying tasks has its effects on OCB partly through job satisfaction and partly independent of job satisfaction. Unfortunately, I did not include job satisfaction in the present study. This issue should therefore be examined in more detail in future studies.

### **Limitations**

A first limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings. The low response rate of 36% implies that the total sample is not sufficiently represented. The particular culture present in the electronic warehouse, as well as the nature of the job tasks, may also limit the generalizability of the results.

The scales used to obtain the data in the present study are however well established and widely used by researchers. The *LMX-7* scale has been found to have the soundest psychometric properties of all LMX instruments (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Moreover, the present study showed that all the scales had good factor structures and high Cronbach's alphas.

A second limitation relates to causality. The fact that the data is obtained through a cross sectional study implies that statements about a causal relationship between LMX and OCB cannot be made. This implies that OCB might as well represent an antecedent of LMX. Indeed, Liden and Graen (1980) explained how high quality exchange relationships may result from extra effort by the member: “The greater amount of job-related feedback, support of actions, and personal sensitivity (...) received by high exchange members may be interpreted as the supervisors’ way of rewarding the extra effort of these “preferred subordinates.”” (p. 464-465). In order to determine the causal sequencing of LMX and OCB longitudinal research is needed.

A third limitation concerns the method used to obtain the data on OCB. In this study employee OCB was measured by self-reports, not by supervisor ratings, which is the common practice. The OCB scale by Podsakoff et al. (1990) was

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intended for supervisor ratings, and in present study the questions were reformulated in order to enable self-ratings. Self-ratings might represent a source for biased data as discrepancies between self-assessments and other-assessment of OCB have been reported. For example, Allen, Barnard, Rush and Russel (2000) reported little consistency between OCB ratings made by self and others (supervisors and peers). Which source that provides the most accurate picture of employee OCB might be difficult to determine. One might think that employees are more prone to rate themselves favorably than their supervisors are. On the other hand, citizenship behavior might not always be observable for superiors, such as in cases when employees help their coworkers with work-related problems, provides extraordinary service to clients or customers, or stays updated on news and announcements. Moreover, being immeasurable in nature and not formally recognized by the organization, OCB might in many cases go unnoticed. Following from this, employees might be the most reliable raters of citizenship behavior.

A fourth limitation relates to the issue of common method bias. As the data on the research variables were obtained from the same source, we face the problem of common method variance. In order to avoid this problem it is common to separate the source of data for the independent variables (in this study LMX) from the dependent variables (OCB) (Lam, Hui & Law, 1999). The correlation between LMX and OCB has been found to vary considerably in accordance with the rating source. In their meta-study, Ilies et al. (2007) found that the correlation scores between LMX and OCB were larger when the two constructs were measured by the same source than by different sources ( $\rho=.54$  versus  $\rho=.32$ ). As such, this study might have had demonstrated a weaker correlation between LMX and OCB if supervisors were to rate OCB.

A final limitation concerns the positive correlation obtained between LMX and task feedback. Although the questionnaire items that constitute task feedback are supposed to measure performance feedback from the task itself, it is possible that the respondents interpreted the questions as relating to performance feedback from the leader. In so case, the effect of task feedback on OCB may actually represent the effect of leader feedback on OCB. Similarly, intrinsically satisfying tasks would not be related to feedback from the task, but to feedback from the leader. In the present discussion, it was assumed that task feedback partly stemmed from the leader.

### **Implications for research**

This study has provided new insight into the mechanisms of how leader-member-exchange quality impacts organizational citizenship behavior. Intrinsically satisfying tasks proved to be an important explanatory factor for the relationship. Future research should pay increased attention to the role of task characteristics in general, and intrinsically satisfying tasks in particular, when examining the relationships between LMX and the various form of citizenship behavior. Failing to consider employees' experiences of task satisfaction will lead to biased results. Further, future research might examine what characterizes tasks that are experienced as intrinsically satisfying, as well as what leaders may do to ensure task satisfaction.

Additional research is also needed on the connection between intrinsically satisfying tasks and general satisfaction, or job satisfaction. By examining job satisfaction as a potential mediator in the relationship between task satisfaction and OCB, it might be revealed whether the actual effect of satisfying tasks on OCB is through job satisfaction, or not. As such, it might be revealed if task satisfaction really is a unique predictor of OCB.

The present study has further demonstrated that all the task characteristics have direct impact on OCB, and that intrinsically satisfying tasks was beyond comparison the most significant predictor. It is somewhat surprising however that task feedback and routine tasks only had their effects on sportsmanship, and not on conscientiousness or altruism, which are considered the main forms of OCB. More research on the relationship between these two task characteristics and OCB might reveal if sportsmanship really is the most likely outcome.

### *Implications for practice*

This study has demonstrated that a considerable amount of citizenship behavior is accounted for by experiences of task satisfaction. A high quality personal relationship between the leader and his or her subordinate combined with interesting tasks seems to be a good recipe for promoting OCB. If employees do not experience task enjoyment, the likelihood that a high quality LMX relationship has a positive effect on OCB diminishes. Practitioners should focus on establishing good personal relationships with their employees, and provide them with sufficient support and help. Further, they ought to be aware of the powerful effects involved in task characteristics, and be mindful when designing job tasks for employees. Including employees when designing tasks and empower them with decision authority may represent valuable means for ensuring task satisfaction. As a part of the exchange relationship between the leader and the member, the leader should thus strive to enrich the tasks of the member. Combined with a high quality leader-member relationship, enjoyable and interesting tasks increase the likelihood that employees show responsibility for their organization and help their coworkers.

It was suggested however that some individuals might be less concerned with the personal relationship with their leaders. Interesting tasks may to some individuals be the strongest source for motivation, as well as OCB. In such cases leaders may act as a more distant figure, and rather facilitate the working conditions that ensure autonomy and decision-authority for the workers.

The moderately strong correlations found in this study between LMX and task feedback, and between task feedback and sportsmanship, further suggest that leaders should provide employees with information related to their task progress. Helping employees evaluate their task performance thus also represents a resource that leaders might bring with them into the exchange relationships. Finally, the present study showed that routine tasks tend to decrease sportsmanship, that is, behavior such as showing resilience towards adversity. This suggests that leaders should ensure that employees are not given tasks that are overly uniform and routine.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to test the mediating effects of task characteristics on the relationship between LMX and five OCB dimensions conscientiousness, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and altruism. The findings demonstrated that the task characteristic intrinsically satisfying tasks completely mediated all the relationships, while task feedback and routine tasks had no mediating effects. Intrinsically satisfying tasks thus seems to account for a large portion of the positive relationship between LMX and OCB. The study further revealed that task satisfaction has a stronger single effect on OCB than LMX quality. The importance of interesting and satisfactory tasks for employee behavior such as extra effort and willingness to help others at work was thus demonstrated in this study. A high quality LMX relationship, where the leader provides the member with interesting tasks seems to be a strong catalyst of employee OCB.

The degree of performance feedback provided by the task itself showed direct and positive effects on an overall score of OCB, as well as on sportsmanship. It was suggested however that task feedback also might stem from the leader. As such, the leader might provide employees with task-related feedback in order to promote citizenship behavior. Finally, routine tasks showed significant and negative effects on the OCB dimension sportsmanship, suggesting that uniform and repetitive tasks decrease employees' willingness to engage in this particular form of citizenship behavior. It was argued that researchers ought to pay considerably more attention to the task dimension intrinsically satisfying tasks when studying the LMX-OCB relationship. Finally, practitioners who wish to promote citizenship behavior should be supportive and helpful towards their subordinates, and provide them with tasks that are interesting and enjoyable.

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**Appendix**
*Appendix A. Table 1*

N=168

		Frequency	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Man	130	77
	Woman	38	23
<b>Age</b>	18-25	48	29
	25-35	80	48
	35-45	29	17
	45+	11	6
<b>Education</b>	Lower secondary school (1-9 years)	16	10
	Upper secondary school (10-12 years)	103	61
	University/ college (13- 16 years)	44	26
	University (16+ years)	5	3
<b>Position</b>	Full-time	162	96
	Part-time	6	4
<b>Tenure (years)</b>	1-2	21	13
	2-5	78	46
	5-10	54	32
	10-20	12	7
	20-30	2	1
	30-35	1	1
<b>Work sector</b>	Administration, economy, IT, office, law	6	3
	Sales, customer service	121	72
	Transportation, logistics, warehouse	25	15
	Other	13	8
	HR/ personnel	3	2
<b>Leader</b>	Top management	10	6
	Middle management	41	24
	First line management	63	38
	No leader position	54	32
<b>Employee representative</b>	Yes	16	10
	No	152	90

<b>Immediate supervisor (gender)</b>	Female	20	12
	Male	148	88

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**Appendix B. Questionnaire**

**Vennligst fyll ut bakgrunnsinformasjon om deg selv (sett ring eller fyll ut).**

1. Alder \_\_\_\_ (skriv)
2. Kjønn:        A. Kvinne        B. Mann
3. Tillitsvalgt? A. Ja                B. Nei
4. Hvor lenge har du arbeidet i organisasjonen (eller i eventuelle forløpere til organisasjonen)?  
\_\_\_\_ år (skriv)
5. Hvilket ansettelsesforhold har du?    A. Full stilling                B. Deltidsansatt
  
6. Høyeste fullførte utdanning:
  - A. Grunnskole (1-9 år)
  - B. Videregående skole/Gymnas/Yrkesskole (10-12 år)
  - C. Høyskole/Universitet – lavere grad (13-16 år)
  - D. Universitet – høyere grad (mer enn 16 år)
  - E. Doktorgrad/PhD
  
7. Er du leder?
  - A. Ja, hører til toppledelsen
  - B. Ja, hører til mellomledelsen
  - C. Ja, hører til førstelinjeledelsen
  - D. Nei, jeg har ikke personalansvar
  
8. I hvilken sektor jobber du?
  - A. Offentlig                B. Privat
  
9. I hvilket næringsområde jobber du?
  - A. Administrasjon, økonomi, kontor, jus
  - B. Bygg/anlegg, håndverk, verkstedarbeid
  - C. Handel, salg, kundeservice, restaurant, reiseliv
  - D. Helse/omsorg
  - E. Industri, fabrikk
  - F. Jord-/skogbruk, fiske (primærnæringer)
  - G. Kultur, religiøst arbeid, idrett
  - H. Media, aviser, TV

I. Sikkerhet og vakthold

J. Skole, fritid

K. Transport, logistikk, IT

L. Undervisning (på høyskole/universitet),  
forskning

M. Olje og gass

N. Annet, spesifiser under:

10. Min nærmeste leder er:      A. Kvinne      B. Mann

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**1. DIN ATFERD PÅ JOBBEN (OCB)**

*Her ber vi deg ta stilling til hvordan du opptrer i organisasjonen og overfor dine kolleger. Kryss av for det svaralternativet som du mener passer best.*

*(Vær vennlig å svare i tråd med din faktiske opptreden - ikke hvordan du ønsker å opptre).*

	Helt uenig	Uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Enig	Helt enig
1. Min innsats på jobben overskrider det som er vanlig ( <i>Conscientiousness</i> )					
2. Jeg tar ikke ekstra pauser ( <i>Conscientiousness</i> )					
3. Jeg etterkommer bedriftens lover og regler selv når ingen følger med ( <i>Conscientiousness</i> )					
4. Jeg er en av organisasjonens mest samvittighetsfulle ansatte ( <i>Conscientiousness</i> )					
5. Jeg mener man må gjøre seg fortjent til den lønnen man får ( <i>Conscientiousness</i> )					
6. Jeg bruker mye tid på klage over små ting (sportsmanship)					
7. Jeg fokuserer alltid på det som er galt fremfor å se det positive i ting (sportsmanship)					
8. Jeg pleier å gjøre problemer mye større enn de er (sportsmanship)					
9. Jeg finner alltid feil ved det organisasjonen gjør (sportsmanship)					
10. Jeg er vanskelig å ha med å gjøre og trenger mye positiv oppmerksomhet fra andre (sportsmanship)					
11. Jeg deltar på viktige møter selv om det ikke er obligatorisk oppmøte (civic virtue)					
12. Jeg tar del i aktiviteter som styrker bedriftens image selv om jeg ikke må (civic virtue)					

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13. Jeg er alltid oppdatert om endringer i organisasjonen (civic virtue)					
14. Jeg leser og holder meg oppdatert om organisasjonens kunngjøringer, memoer osv. (civic virtue)					
15. Jeg tar forhåndsregler for å forebygge problemer med andre (courtesy)					
16. Jeg er bevisst hvordan min atferd kan påvirke andres arbeid (courtesy)					
17. Jeg utnytter ikke andre (courtesy)					
18. Jeg forsøker å unngå å skape problemer for mine kolleger (courtesy)					
19. Jeg tar hensyn til hvordan min atferd påvirker mine kolleger (courtesy)					
20. Jeg hjelper andre som har vært borte fra jobben (Altruism)					
21. Jeg hjelper andre som har stor arbeidsbelastning (Altruism)					
22. Jeg hjelper nyansatte med å orientere seg i bedriften selv om det ikke forventes av meg (Altruism)					
23. Jeg hjelper gjerne andre som har arbeidsrelaterte problemer (Altruism)					
24. Jeg er alltid rede til å gi en hjelpende hånd til mennesker rundt meg (Altruism)					

## 2. DITT FORHOLD TIL DIN NÆRMESTE LEDER

*Her ber vi deg beskrive ditt forhold til din nærmeste leder. Sett ring rundt det svaralternativet som du mener passer best.*

25. Vet du hvor fornøyd din leder er med hva du gjør på jobb?	1. Nesten aldri	2. En sjelden gang	3. Noen ganger	4. Ofte	5. Svært ofte	
26. Hvor godt forstår din leder dine problemer og behov knyttet til dine arbeidsoppgaver og arbeidssituasjon?		1. Forstår ikke	2. Litt	3. En del	4. Ganske mye	5. Forstår helt
27. I hvor stor grad ser din leder hva du er god for (ditt potensial)?	1. Ikke i det hele tatt	2. Litt	3. Moderat	4. Mye	5. Veldig mye	
28. Uavhengig av hvor mye makt og innflytelse lederen din har: Hvor sannsynlig er det at din leder vil benytte seg av sin innflytelse for å hjelpe deg med å løse dine problemer i ditt arbeid?	1. Ikke sannsynlig	2. Litt sannsynlig	3. Noe sannsynlig	4. Ganske sannsynlig	5. Veldig sannsynlig	
29. Uavhengig av makt og innflytelse: Hvor sannsynlig er det at din leder vil ta "støyten" for deg hvis du er i en "knipe"?	1. Ikke sannsynlig	2. Litt sannsynlig	3. Noe sannsynlig	4. Ganske sannsynlig	5. Veldig sannsynlig	
30. Tiltroen til min leder er så stor at jeg ville ha forsvart og rettfærdiggjort min leders beslutninger i hans eller hennes fravær	1. Sterkt uenig	2. Uenig	3. Nøytral	4. Enig	5. Veldig enig	
31. Hvordan vil du beskrive ditt samarbeidsforhold til din nærmeste leder?	1. Ikke bra	2. Dårligere enn normalt	3. Normalt	4. Bedre enn normalt	5. Veldig bra	

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**3. DIN BESKRIVELSE AV JOBBEN (TASK CHARACTERISTICS)**

*Her ber vi deg beskrive hvordan du opplever arbeidet ditt. Kryss av for det svaralternativet som du mener passer best.*

	Helt uenig	Uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Enig	Helt enig
32. Det meste av arbeidet mitt er ganske repeterende av natur (Routine)					
33. Jeg utfører samme type aktiviteter hver dag (Routine)					
34. Jobben min forandrer seg lite fra en dag til den neste (Routine)					
35. Jobben min er enkel og rutinepreget (Routine)					
36. Jeg utfører de fleste arbeidsoppgavene mine på samme måte (Routine)					
37. Arbeidsoppgavene mine er utformet slik at det er lett å se når jeg har gjort jobben riktig (TaskFeedback)					
38. I min jobb får jeg tilbakemelding om hvor godt jeg gjør det (TaskFeedback)					

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39. Jobben min gir meg en følelse som gjør at jeg vet om jeg gjør det godt eller dårlig (TaskFeedback)					
40. Jobben min gir meg gode muligheter til å finne ut hvor godt jeg gjør det (TaskFeedback)					
41. Arbeidet mitt gir meg mye glede (Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks)					
42. Jeg liker arbeidsoppgavene mine (Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks)					
43. Jobben min gir meg personlig veldig mye (Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks)					
44. Arbeidsoppgavene mine er veldig interessante (Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks)					
45. Jeg liker ingen av arbeidsoppgavene mine (Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks)					

Vennligst sjekk at alle spørsmålene er besvart.

Tusen takk for hjelpen!

BI Norwegian Business School - Preliminary Thesis Report

*Task characteristics as a mediator in the relationship between  
Leader-Member Exchange and Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

MSc in Leadership and Organizational Psychology

16.01.2012

Student: Ole Bendvold

Supervisor: Lars Glasø

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## Summary

The objective of my thesis is to examine the relationship between Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and whether Task Characteristics mediate this relationship. LMX, defined as relationship-based leadership based on mutual trust and commitment, has been found to correlate positively with Organizational Citizenship Behavior; employee behavior that is extraordinary, in the sense that it is non-required and voluntary and aims at helping coworkers and that contributes to the productivity of the organization. The “altruistic” and “conscientious” acts of OCB are commonly thought of as being a natural part of the LMX relationship; in return for social support and informal rewards provided by the leader in a high quality LMX relationship, the member reciprocate these favors in the form of helping behavior towards other coworkers and committing to organizational goals, that in the aggregate favors the leader.

Although a positive relationship between LMX and OCB is well documented, little attention has been given to potential mediators in the LMX-OCB relationship. As I will show, “Task Characteristics”, being a part of the broader category “substitutes for leadership”, have been found to have unique effects on OCB, as well as mediating effects in the relationship between leader behaviors and various employee outcomes. Specifically, I show that “Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks” may compensate for lack of perceived fairness in a LMX relationship that would otherwise lead to less OCB. I suggest that task characteristics may have important effects on OCB, and may also serve as potential mediators the LMX-OCB relationship. Three preliminary hypotheses are presented that form the basis for my study.

## **Introduction**

In the following I will define Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) as it has been understood in research over the past three decades. I will go on and define some important antecedents of OCB, with a focus on Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) and its proposed relationship with OCB. Further, I will discuss some possible mediators in the LMX-OCB relationship, introducing the relevant construct “task characteristics”. Based on the analysis, I define three preliminary hypotheses. A short description of the research method follows at the end.

### **Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

The nature of Organizational Citizenship Behavior has been of interest to researchers since the early eighties and has gained increased attention since the early nineties up to present time (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine & Bachrach, 2000, for yearly publications). Organizational Citizenship Behavior is characterized by behavior that goes beyond participants subscribed roles and tasks, and takes the form of helping behavior that is both beneficial to fellow employees as well as the organization as a whole (Organ, 1988). OCB is often called “extra-role behavior” where employees “go above and beyond the call of duty” (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1993, p. 261).

Dennis W. Organ, one of the pioneers within the field of OCB, characterized citizenship behavior as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ 1988, p. 4).

A study that provided the basis for how OCB, was going to be understood was that of Smith, Organ & Near (1983). The authors were interested in finding out what constitutes extraordinary employee behavior that would lead to increased organizational effectiveness. Among the sixteen most often reported actions were such as helping fellow employees with workloads, orientating newly hired people, being punctual, taking initiative and volunteering for doing extra work. More research on the items led the authors to extract two main factors that they labeled “Altruism” and “Generalized Compliance” (known today as

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“Conscientiousness”). Altruism referred to support and help towards individuals, whereas generalized compliance referred to behavior directed at the organization (striving towards organizational goals).

Today, OCB is most often understood as including five factors: *Altruism*, or pro-social behavior, referring to such as helping coworkers with solving tasks; *Courtesy*, reflecting initiatives made by individuals to avoid problems from occurring for fellow employees; *Sportsmanship*, the tendency to *not* complain, finding faults and focusing on problems (but rather being open-minded, tolerant and positive); *Civic Virtue*, showing responsibility and participating in political or governmental processes of the organization, and *Conscientiousness*, being honest and following company rules (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990).

### **Antecedents of OCB**

Leadership behaviors, such as transformational leadership and LMX leadership, have been found to be important antecedents of OCB, showing strong positive effects on various citizenship behaviors (e.g. H. Wang, Law, Hackett, D. Wang & Chen, 2005; Ilies, Nahrgang & Morgeson, 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Bommer, 1996; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Variables such as “trust in leader”, “organizational justice” and “leader fairness” have also been found to influence the degree to which employees participate in OCB activities (e.g. Bahl, 2005; Farh et al., 1990; Moorman, 1991; Organ, 1990; Deluga, 1994; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1993). Moreover, trust and fairness have also been found to have strong mediating effects in the relationship between leadership behaviors and OCB (e.g. Bahl, 2005; Fahr, Podsakoff & Organ, 1990). Perceived organizational support (POS) have also been found to have significant effects on OCB (e.g. Wayne, Tetrick, Shore & Bommer, 2002; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997). A meta-study by Podsakoff et al. (2000) showed that the OCB dimensions helping, courtesy, conscientiousness, and sportsmanship correlated positively with “trust in leader”, “core transformational leadership”, “perceived organizational support” and “leader-member exchange” (LMX), though a weaker relationship existed with the OCB dimension “civic virtue”.

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***LMX: Reciprocal leadership***

Leader-Member-Exchange (LMX) is a form of leadership that is based on mutual adaptation between a supervisor and his or her subordinate. Instead of the leader executing a specific leadership style towards all the employees, he or she adapts leadership behaviors based on each individual's behavior and needs (Organ, Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2006, p. 56). One might argue that both parties in the LMX relationship is leading each other, as each one's behavior is dependent on the others'.

LMX represents a form of social exchange relationship where support and informal rewards are provided by the leader in exchange for commitment and extra effort provided by the subordinate (Organ et al., 2006, p. 56). The relationship goes beyond formal job-descriptions and formal rewards and is non-contractual; the leaders' goal is to stimulate to increased effort and commitment to tasks by providing support and feedback on performance, as well as giving the employees opportunities for such as more work-autonomy, more input in workplace decisions and training (Organ et al., 2006, p. 56). Mutual trust, respect and felt obligation become the glue that binds the parties together in the LMX relationship (Wang et al., 2005).

The factors "organizational justice" or "perceptions of fairness" and "leader fairness" (Bahl, 2005; Farh et al., 1990; Moorman, 1991; Organ, 1990; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1993) are central in the LMX relationship (e.g. Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1993; Bahl, 2005), as the basis for LMX is equity, or a balanced give-and-take relationship. As noted by Graen & Scandura (1987), "The relationship (LMX) is based on social exchange, wherein each party must offer something the other party sees as valuable and each party must see the exchange as reasonably equitable or fair" (p. 182).

LMX has been found to correlate with a variety of organizational attitudes and behaviors, including job performance, satisfaction with supervisor, overall satisfaction, commitment, role conflict, role clarity, member competence, and turnover intentions (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

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***The LMX-OCB relationship***

An increasing amount of research has documented a positive relationship between LMX and OCB. Podsakoff et al. (2000) showed that LMX quality had significant positive effects on both the OCB dimension “altruism”, and what they labeled “overall OCB”. In Ilies et al.’s (2007) meta-study, LMX predicted OCB behavior at the individual-targeted level (helping and pro-social behavior) and at the organizational targeted level (striving towards organizational goals), though its effect on the individual-targeted level was strongest.

Wang et al. (2005) demonstrated the magnitude of the LMX-OCB relationship by showing that LMX quality fully mediated the positive relationship between transformational leadership and OCB. According to the authors, transformational leadership, characterized by providing an appealing vision, fostering group goals, individualized support and intellectual stimulation, would in itself not be sufficient for enhancing OCB, unless qualities in the LMX relationship, such as mutual trust, respect and felt obligation were established first. The authors also found that transformational leadership behavior was important in establishing a high quality LMX relationship. Worth noting is also their finding that OCB showed a direct and positive link to task performance, supporting the view that OCB relates to employee performance.

According to findings by Wayne et al. (1997), the construct “Perceived Organization Support” (POS), and LMX are interrelated concepts. Though the two constructs remain significantly distinctive, LMX has been found to play an important role in establishing POS, demonstrated by the fact that as the quality of LMX increases, so does the perception of organizational support (Wayne et al., 1997). Of interest is also the authors finding that LMX had positive effects on employee performance, in contrast to POS, which had not.

***OCB and LMX in a social exchange perspective***

A basic assumption concerning the relationship between LMX and OCB is that participating in citizenship behavior, characterized by extra effort towards organizational goals and pro-social behavior, is a way of paying back for the informal rewards and resources the employees receive by the supervisor in the

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LMX relationship (Wang et al., 2005; Bahl, 2005). In this way, OCB becomes a natural part in the reciprocal relationship between the member and the leader. Wayne et al. (2002) describes the LMX-OCB “process” as follows:

From a social exchange perspective, a high-quality exchange may create a sense of obligation on the part of the subordinate to reciprocate in terms of behaviors valued by the supervisor. Consistent with this perspective, high-quality exchanges tend to be associated with employee behavior that benefits the supervisor and goes beyond the formal job duties (Liden & Graen, 1980). Subordinates may engage in OCB and perform at a high level to reciprocate for rewards and support provided by the supervisor, thus maintaining a balanced or equitable social exchange with the supervisor. (p. 593)

Organ (1990) found a positive relationship between OCB (defined as including altruism and compliance), and the two “dispositional” characteristics individual traits and “affective satisfaction”. The author further demonstrated the importance of perceived fairness as a moderator between an individual’s dispositions and OCB. The author suggest that perceived fairness in the social exchange relationship with the organization influences whether a person feels obligated to participate in citizenship behaviors or not. Experiences of unfair treatment by the organization may result in employees participating in less OCB, or as Organ states:

Once the threshold for perception of unfairness in social exchange is breached, and the relationship with the organization is redefined in terms of economic exchange, a ”controlled” regulation of OCB comes into play. Gestures of OCB that might otherwise have been proffered in unconstrained fashion are withheld or extracted grudgingly. (p. 67)

Accordingly, any perceived unbalance in the social exchange relationship between a member and organization may result in less (or more) OCB. The exchange relationship is typically represented through LMX, as a leader is the main provider of organizational resources to the employees. Perceptions of unfairness in the

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LMX relationship will hence affect the degree to which the member participates in OCB activities.

### **Potential mediators in the LMX-OCB relationship**

As we have seen, the hypothesized positive relationship between LMX and OCB has been well supported by research. However, as Organ et al. (2006) states, “surprisingly little research has examined potential mediators of this relationship” (p. 105). Some studies have though documented some mediating effects: Podsakoff and MacKenzie (1993) found that perceived fairness and job satisfaction completely mediated the relationship between LMX and the OCB dimensions courtesy and civic virtue, and Bahl (2005) found that perceived fairness, related to procedural and interpersonal processes, had important mediating effects in the LMX-OCB relationship.

#### ***Substitutes for leadership***

Kerr and Jermier (1978) introduced the concept “substitutes for leadership” for describing factors other than leadership that might influence employee behavior. The authors separated between three such substitutes: organizational characteristics (e.g. degree of formalization), individual characteristics (e.g. ability, experience) and task characteristics (e.g. routine tasks).

Substitutes for leadership have received little attention as possible antecedents of OCB, though they have been found to have unique effects on OCB (Podsakoff et al., 1996). Podsakoff, Niehoff, MacKenzie and Williams (1993, p. 37) emphasize the importance of including both leader behaviors and substitutes for leadership when studying antecedent of employee behavior, after having found that OCB characteristics, such as altruism, attendance and conscientiousness, were influenced to the same degree by such substitutes as by leader behaviors.

Podsakoff et al. (1996, p. 295) conclude that among the most important substitutes to affect employee outcomes, such as attitudes, performance and role perceptions (OCB being a part of such outcomes) are indifference to rewards, routine tasks,

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intrinsically satisfying tasks, organizational formalization and group cohesiveness. Excluding these substitutes when examining the relationship between leadership style (transformational) and employee outcomes will lead to biased results, the authors suggest (p. 295). We might suggest that the relationship between LMX, as an equal important predictor of OCB as transformational leadership, and OCB might suffer from the same biases if these substitutes are excluded.

### ***“Task characteristics”***

As defined by Kerr and Jermier (1978), the substitute “task characteristics” includes whether a task is 1) unambiguous and routine, 2) methodologically invariant, 3) intrinsically satisfying, and whether it 4) provides its own feedback concerning accomplishment<sup>4</sup>.

In their meta-study, Podsakoff et al. (1996) showed that “intrinsically satisfying tasks”, “task feedback” and “routine tasks” had even larger effects on OCB (altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, civic virtue and conscientiousness) than leader behaviors. In yet another meta-study, Podsakoff et al. (2000) demonstrated the same pattern by showing that these task characteristics all had significant effects on all five OCB factors (“routine tasks” being the only factor with a negative effect on OCB). Podsakoff et al. (2000) concludes that the effect of these three task variables on OCB remain an unexplored, but possibly important source for understanding OCB:

Task variables also appear to be consistently related to a wide variety of organizational citizenship behaviors, although little attention has been given to them in the OCB literature ... This is interesting because it suggests a whole new category of antecedents that has not been previously considered. (p. 532)

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<sup>4</sup> *Task feedback is defined by Hackman and Oldham (1976) as “the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his performance”* (pp. 257–258).

Moreover, Farh et al. (1990) found a positive relationship between the task characteristics task autonomy, task significance, task identity, task feedback and task variety (labeled “task scope”) and the citizenship behaviors altruism and compliance. The authors also found that job satisfaction explained less of the variance in OCB than did task scope. They also reported that perceived leader fairness and job satisfaction had a positive impact on the OCB dimension “compliance” only when task scope was included as a mediator. Further, a possible explanation for the relationship between task variables and OCB is suggested by Organ et al. (2006), who found that job satisfaction had some mediating effects in the relationship (p. 111-112).

Taken together, these findings suggest that task characteristics may have important direct effects on OCB, as well important mediating effects in the LMX-OCB relationship. Including them as potential mediators may provide a better understanding of the relationships between LMX and OCB.

### ***Intrinsically Satisfying Tasks as a substitute for LMX***

Of particular interest are the findings by Farh et al. (1990) that showed that task characteristics, such as autonomy, significance, variety, and feedback had unique effects on OCB, independent of satisfaction or fairness. Organ et al. (1990) suggest that intrinsic rewards from executing a task (intrinsically satisfying tasks) may result in the employee paying less attention to a possibly unfair treatment by the leader and hence, “raise one’s threshold for the perception of unfairness” (p. 63). Perceived unfairness in the relationship between the leader and the member in a LMX relationship may then be compensated for by a stimulating task. (One might speculate that for a task to be experienced as intrinsically rewarding, it should have a certain amount of variety to it (routine tasks), as well as it should be possible to assess ones’ own progression related to the execution of the task (task feedback), suggesting that the three task characteristics together make up an intrinsic rewarding task). In a similar vein, Kerr and Jermier (1978) suggest that intrinsically satisfying tasks may substitute for relationship-oriented leader behaviors, as attention is directed away from the leader towards the task at hand (p. 92). As LMX is a type of relationship-based leadership, a task that is

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intrinsically motivating may lower an employee's sensitivity concerning LMX quality, and continue to participate in OCB even if the LMX quality should be low. Leaving out task characteristics such as "intrinsically satisfying task" when examining the LMX-OCB relationship, may hence lead to biased results.

## **Preliminary Hypotheses**

Returning to the purpose of my thesis, I intend to examine the relationship between LMX and OCB, and whether task characteristics mediate this relationship.

The Task Characteristics include 1) *intrinsically satisfying task*, 2) *task feedback* and 3) *routine task*.

My study will be based upon three hypotheses:

***Hypothesis 1.*** *Leader-Member-Exchange is positively related to Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

***Hypothesis 2.*** *Task Characteristics is positively related to Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

***Hypothesis 3.*** *Task Characteristics mediates the relationship between Leader-Member-Exchange and Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

## **Method**

### ***Sample and Procedure***

Respondents for my survey are employees of the Norwegian warehouse chain Elkjøp, a leading actor within the Nordic electronics market. The respondents are managers and subordinates at Elkjøp's main administrative office, as well as sales personnel at various warehouses in Oslo. An electronic questionnaire (45 items) is

distributed by mail to 400 respondents.

### *Measures*

**LMX** is measured using the seven-item scale (LMX-7) obtained from Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995). Each statement is answered on a 5-point Likert scale.

**OCB** is measured using Podsakoff et al's (1990) scale that includes the 5 dimensions: Altruism (five items), Conscientiousness (four items), Sportsmanship (five items), Civic Virtue (four items), and Courtesy (five items). The response options range from 1, "strongly disagree", to 5, "strongly agree". Employee OCB is supposed to be rated by each employee's supervisor. However, we wanted to have the respondents assess their own Citizen Behavior. Therefore, we reframed the questions to make it possible for the respondents to rate their OCB.

**Task Characteristics** is measured using Podsakoff et al's (1993) "Revised Substitutes for Leadership Scale" that includes the dimensions unambiguous, routine, methodologically invariant tasks (5 items), task provided feedback concerning accomplishment (4 items), and intrinsically satisfying tasks (5 items). The response options range from 1, "strongly disagree", to 5, "strongly agree".

## **Plan for data collection and thesis progression**

### **January 15 – February 15**

The questionnaire is distributed by e-mail to 400 employees of Elkjøp.

### **February 15 – Mars 15**

The data material is analyzed using SPSS and results are described.

### **Mars 15 – May 15**

Results are discussed within relevant theory.

### **May 15 – July 15**

Continue working on the thesis. A draft is presented to the supervisor.

**July 15 - September 3 (Submission deadline)**

Finalizing thesis. Handing in by Sept. 3.

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