

**The mediating role of perceived organizational support between leader-member exchange and organizational commitment of volunteers in non-profit sport organizations**

*Hyejin Bang, Florida International University*

*Stephen Ross, University of Minnesota*

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Abstract 29**

Volunteerism is an integral component of human society and has long been recognized as being important among individuals, families, communities and society at large. One sector which is heavily dependent on volunteers is community-based non-profit sport organizations. The non-profit sector is predominately composed of small organizations, and most of the nonprofits operate with minimal budgets. As such, sustaining volunteers' commitment has become an important issue in many non-profit organizations. Numerous studies (Freund, 2005; Worrall, Cooper, & Campbell-Jamison, 2000) have suggested that an individual's organizational commitment influences individual withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover intention. Although many antecedents of organizational commitment have been studied, leader-member exchange and perceived organizational support have been viewed as the most frequently revealed antecedents (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001; Truckenbrodt, 2000). In addition, perceived organizational support (Meyer & Smith, 2000; Masterson et al., 2000; Yoon & Thye, 2002) is considered a mediator that intervenes between leader-member exchange and organizational commitment. The purpose of the present study is to examine the mediating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between leader-member exchange factors and volunteers' organizational commitment in non-profit sport organizations. This research is significant given that there is a lack of empirical research regarding organizational commitment of volunteers, especially in non-profit sport organizations. Most volunteer studies on organizational commitment in sport have mainly focused on organizational commitment and specific consequences such as turnover. Therefore, the body of knowledge still requires extensive research to explain the variables that link with organizational commitment among volunteers in non-profit sport organizations.

Two hundred fifty eight (258) individuals representing 29 non-profit sport organizations in Minnesota participated in a paper-based survey (N=214) and a Web-based survey (N=44). The volunteers working in the non-profit sport organizations consisted of policy level volunteers and continuous volunteers such as board members, administrators, volunteer coaches, or other staff positions. The questionnaire consisted of 4 parts: (1) organizational commitment, (2) perceived organizational support, (3) leader-member exchange, and (4) demographic information. To measure volunteers' organizational commitment, the organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) developed by Meyer and Allen (1997) was used. Only two components of organizational commitment (i.e., affective commitment and normative commitment) were measured. Continuance organizational commitment was not included in the study because it is suggested to be unrelated to the nature of volunteerism in nonprofit organizations. The volunteer members' perception of the leader-member exchange relationship (i.e., affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect) was assessed with the 12-item multidimensional subordinate LMX scale (the LMX-MDM) (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Perceived organizational support was measured using a shorter version of the Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) with 8 items. Responses to all of the items were rated using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Results of the reliability measurements indicate that all Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .71 to .96, meeting the minimum level (.70) recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) except the normative commitment (.59). Thus the normative commitment variable was eliminated from further analysis. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using LISREL 8.7 to build a measurement model and to verify the appropriateness of the scales used in the non-profit sport organization context. The 27 item, 6 construct measurement model including affective commitment, affect, loyalty, contribution, professional respect, and perceived organizational support, indicated that all items for each construct significantly loaded on their corresponding construct. Results from CFA revealed that the chi-square test was significant ( $\chi^2=2766.75$ ,  $df=1473$ ,  $p<.01$ ), which would indicate an unacceptable fit. However, the chi-square test of absolute model fit is sensitive to large sample sizes and non-normality in the underlying distribution of the input variables (Kline, 1998). Thus, the alternative fit indices examined indicated that the measurement model had an acceptable fit of the data: CFI =.95, NFI =.90, NNFI =.94, IFI =.95, RMR = .077, and RMSEA=.058 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hair, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kelloway, 1998; Kline, 1998; Steiger, 1989, 1998).

The study predicted that the relationships between the leader-member exchange (LMX) factors and affective organizational commitment would not be direct, but rather be mediated by perceived organizational support (POS). The structural model with the relationships was then tested using structural equation modeling (SEM). However, because of the high correlations among the four LMX factors (i.e., affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect), the study combined all the items into one

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single LMX factor. The results indicated that although the  $\chi^2$  value (1852.51,  $df=323$ ) was significant at  $p < .01$ , other fit indices indicated that the structural model achieved a satisfactory fit with the data (NFI=.90, NNFI=.91, IFI=.92, and CFI=0.92). The relationship between the LMX and POS variables was positively significant ( $f=.65$ ), and the effect of POS on affective organizational commitment was positively significant as well ( $f=.79$ ). Given that the model including the indirect effect of LMX on affective organizational commitment fit well to the data, a model including both the direct and indirect effects was tested to identify if both effects exist simultaneously. However, the model had a marginally acceptable fit and exhibited positive relationships between LMX and POS ( $f=.68$ ) and between POS and affective organizational commitment ( $f=1.10$ ). However, the direct effect from LMX to affective organizational commitment was negatively significant ( $f=-.39$ ), and unlikely to be conceptually understandable in the model.

The SEM for the data analysis lends support to the structural model linking volunteers' organizational commitment, POS, and LMX factors. This study also provides evidence that the measurements of the POS mediator are particularly appropriate for investigating the development of volunteer commitment in non-profit sport organizations. Considering the important role of leader-member relations, leaders in non-profit sport organizations should be attentive to volunteer relationships and should attempt to form an enhanced line of communication with volunteer members. This is particularly important in terms of the perception of organizational support and commitment with the volunteer. High leader-member exchange relationships might stimulate volunteer members' feeling of support provided by the organization, which might influence the members' intention to be more associated with the organization. Therefore, the study emphasizes the importance of leaders playing an essential role as a key agent of the organization through which members form their perceptions of the organization.