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The Qualitative Study of Leadership: *Research Methods and Substantive Findings*

KAPLAN DEVRIES INC.

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Methodological Issues in the Comparison of Leadership Experience Data from Unique Groups

E. Van Velsor



A Qualitative Approach to Understanding Leader-Member Exchange Relationships

H. H. M. Tse, M. T. Dasborough, & N. M. Ashkanasy



Improving Leadership in University-based Cooperative Research Centers

D. Rosenberg, J. T. Lindberg, & S. B. Craig



Engaging Leadership: A Qualitative Study of How Leaders Impact Team Engagement

J. T. Lindberg, & R. B. Kaiser



Discussant

L. Peterson



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Methodological Issues in the Comparison of Leadership Experience Data from Unique Groups

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Qualitative Methods

- | Procedures for 'coming to terms with the meaning, not the frequency' of a phenomenon by studying it in its social context (Van Maanen, 1983)
- | Allow for greater cross-cultural understanding and less likely to suffer from "cultural" bias and ethnocentric assumptions on the part of the researcher than survey instruments
- | Data are context specific
- | Researcher often understood to be the instrument – identity and role important impact

Assumptions



- | Researcher can be beyond own frameworks to allow data to speak for itself
- | Study is not comparative across groups likely to differ in significant ways with respect to focal question
- | Qualitative research always takes on “emic” perspective

Research Epistemology



- | Emic – insider or local perspective, concrete reality, context rich
- | Etic – outsider or global perspective, research abstraction, scientific explanation
- | Both important, necessary – most ethnographers use both
- | Combined in best comparative, cross-cultural research

Issues of Validity



- | Qualitative research essentially inductive and often exploratory, so validity questioned from deductive, hypothesis-testing perspective
- | Our 'tradition' defines what we can and cannot see, yet these 'prejudices' are also a condition for understanding
- | To stand outside of one's history would not mean having an objective view, but no view at all (Noorderhaven, 2006)

What If



- | Desire is to answer the same question across multiple populations that are likely to differ in their basic orientation or experience sets
- | There is uncertainty as to the meaning of the question itself and/or the established way of understanding responses across populations

Key Issues



- | Does bounding the coding of data with a pre-existing coding scheme
 - i Facilitate useful comparative research
 - i Blind the researcher to important, unique aspects of new focal data
- | Search for the 'emic' – unique qualities of groups vs. 'etic' – universal qualities
- | Delegation of data collection/analysis to local researchers – limited ability to compare, challenge, synthesize 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives

Most Useful Approach



- | Is one most appropriate to questions one wishes to pose of the data
- | Encompasses both traditions – emic, etic
- | Uses local to expand the horizon, arrive at what is universal

CCL Research Experience

I Lessons of Experience & Derailment

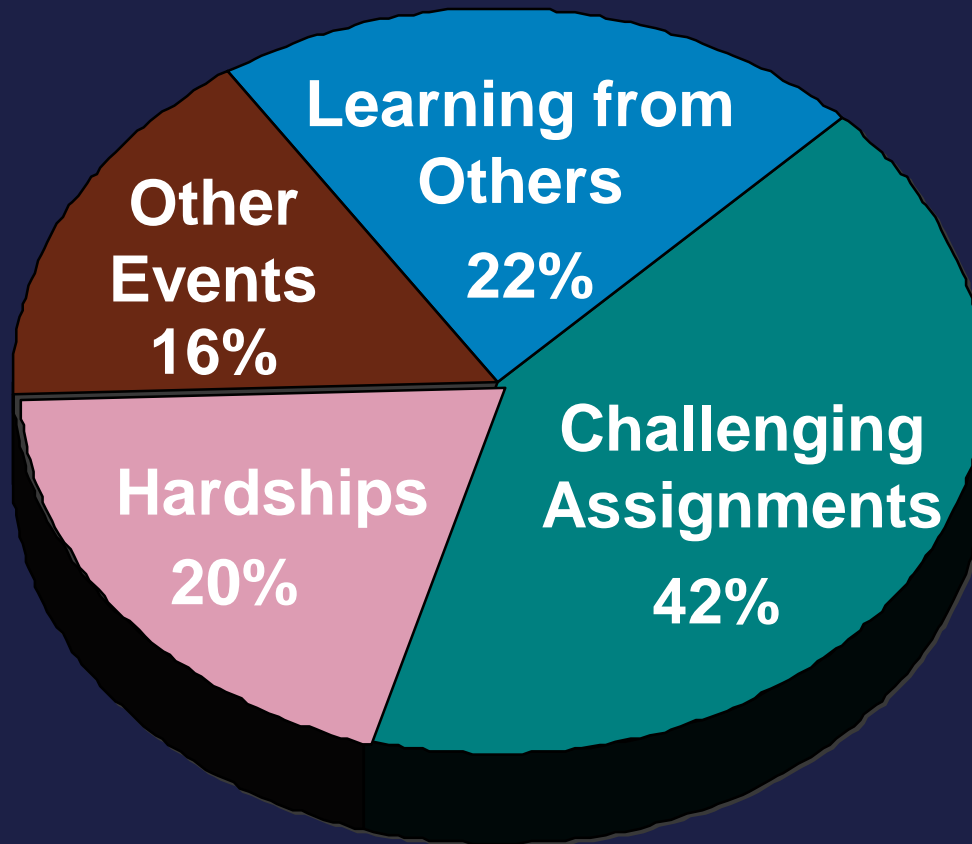
- i Comparing women's data to men's
- i Comparing European data to US
- i Looking at US data over time
- i Collecting data on African-American managers
- i Study done by researchers in Japan using CCL LOE framework
- i Issues arising in initiating data collection in other parts of Asia

Research Question



- | How do executives learn, grow, and change over the course of their careers?
 - i Potentially a universally interesting question
- | What factors account for the ongoing success/effectiveness of some managers, while others derail at senior levels?
 - i Organizational culture, differential treatment, national culture, individual factors

Lessons of Experience – Original North America Sample, Men



LOE NA Key Events - Men

- | First supervisory job
- | Managing larger scope
- | Project/task force
- | Turnaround
- | Line to staff
- | Start up
- | Bosses
- | Values playing out
- | Career setback
- | Changing jobs
- | Personal trauma
- | Employee perf probs
- | Business mistakes
- | Purely personal
- | Coursework
- | Early work experience

LOE NA Key Events - Women

- | First management job
- | First GM job
- | Rocky road
- | Career change
- | Move to corp staff
- | Staff to line
- | Other promotions
- | Helpful boss
- | Helpful others
- | Bad boss
- | Confront prob employees
- | Firing employee
- | Making a mistake
- | A conflict
- | Missed promotion
- | Fix-it
- | Negotiation
- | Task force
- | Other assignments
- | Feedback
- | Milestones in corp saavy
- | Having children
- | Family changes/relocation
- | Coursework

Top LOE – Key Events (%)

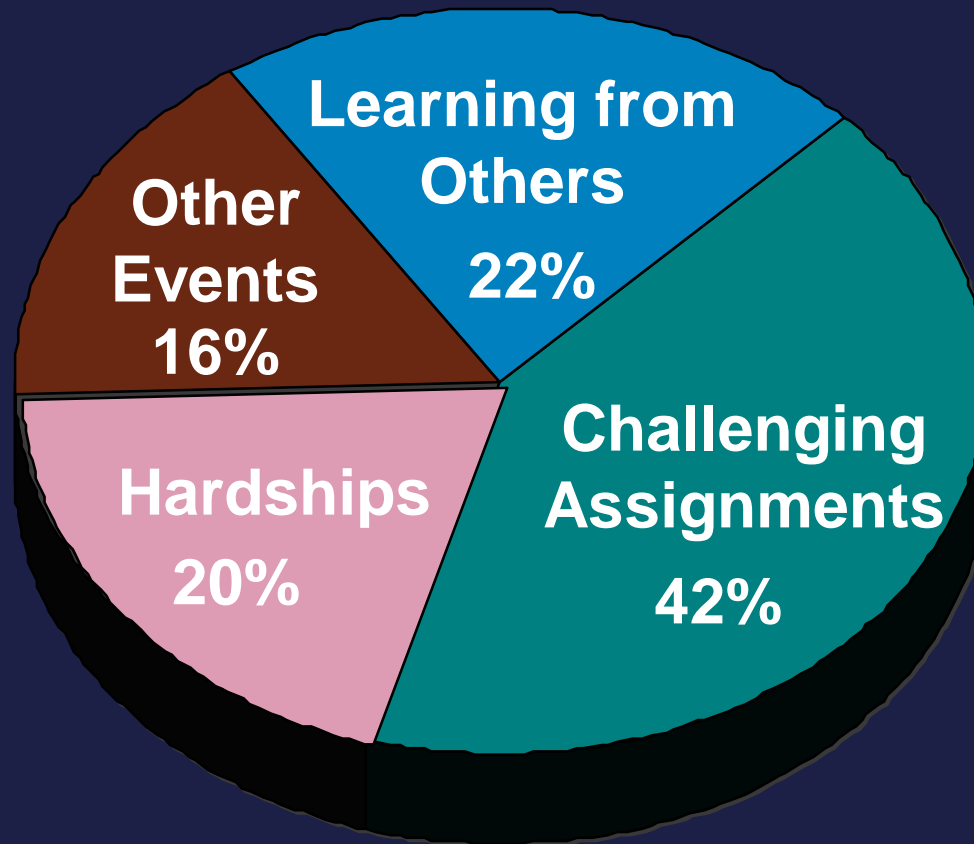
NA Men

NA Women

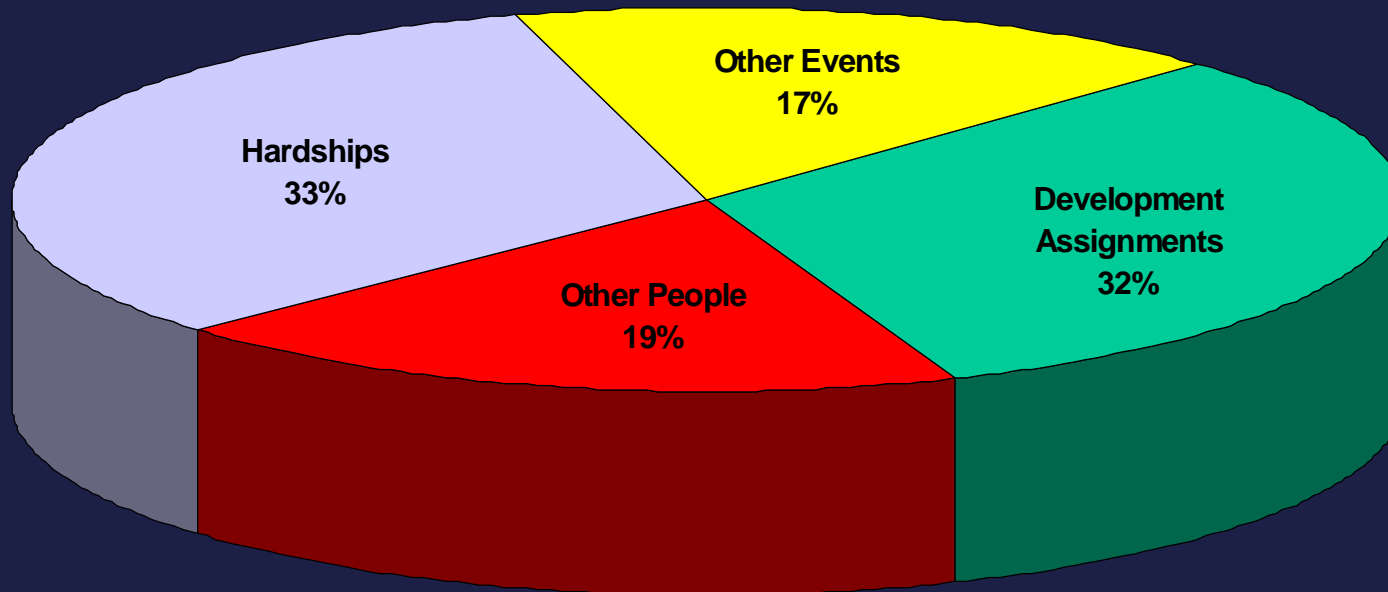
- | Managing larger scope (41)
- | Turnaround (30)
- | Project/task force (27)
- | Values playing out (24)
- | Coursework (19)
- | Bosses (18)
- | Start up (17)
- | First supervision (16)

- | Bosses (51)
- | Managing larger scope (42)
- | Values playing out (31)
- | First supervision (22)
- | Business mistakes (22)
- | Project/task force (21)
- | Employee perf probs (19)
- | Changing jobs (18)

Lessons of Experience – Original North America Sample, Men

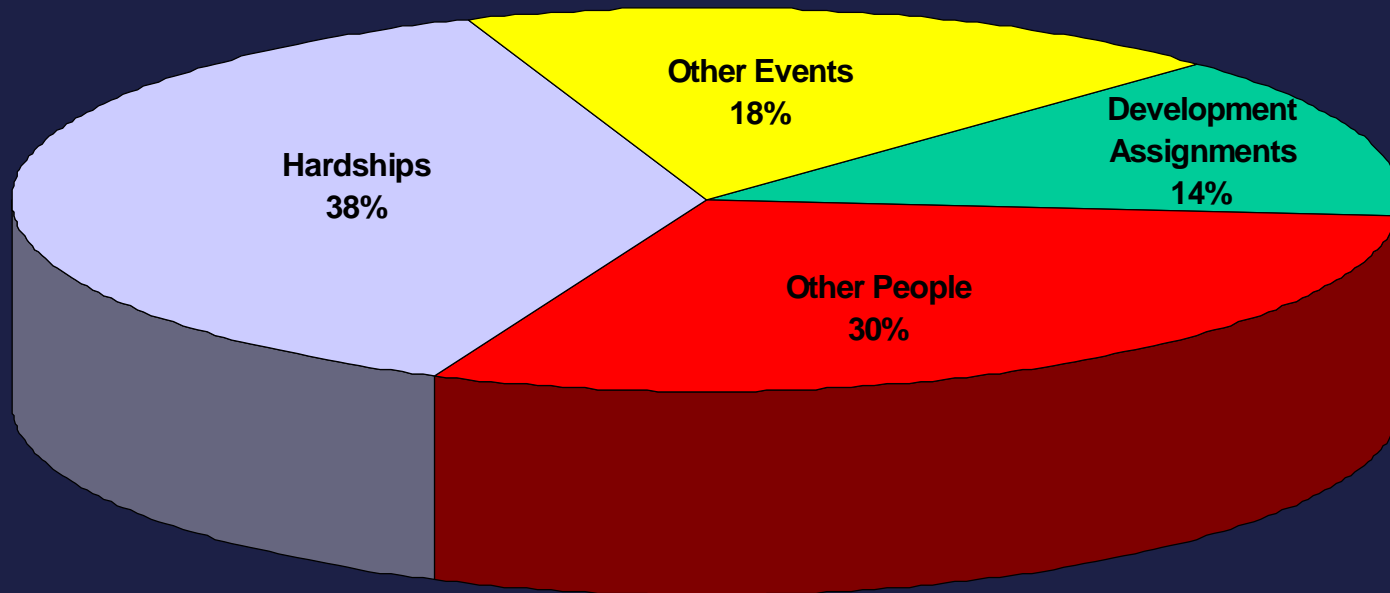


Diverse Sample: Events from NA Men



n = 529 Events

Diverse Sample: Events from NA Women



n = 223 Events

New Events w/Diverse Samples

- | Race Mattered
- | Gender Mattered
- | Mentors
- | Peers
- | Downsizing
- | Feedback
- | Business Success
- | International assignment
- | Merger/acquisition
- | Organizational crises
- | Succeeding against the best
- | Apprenticeship to senior role

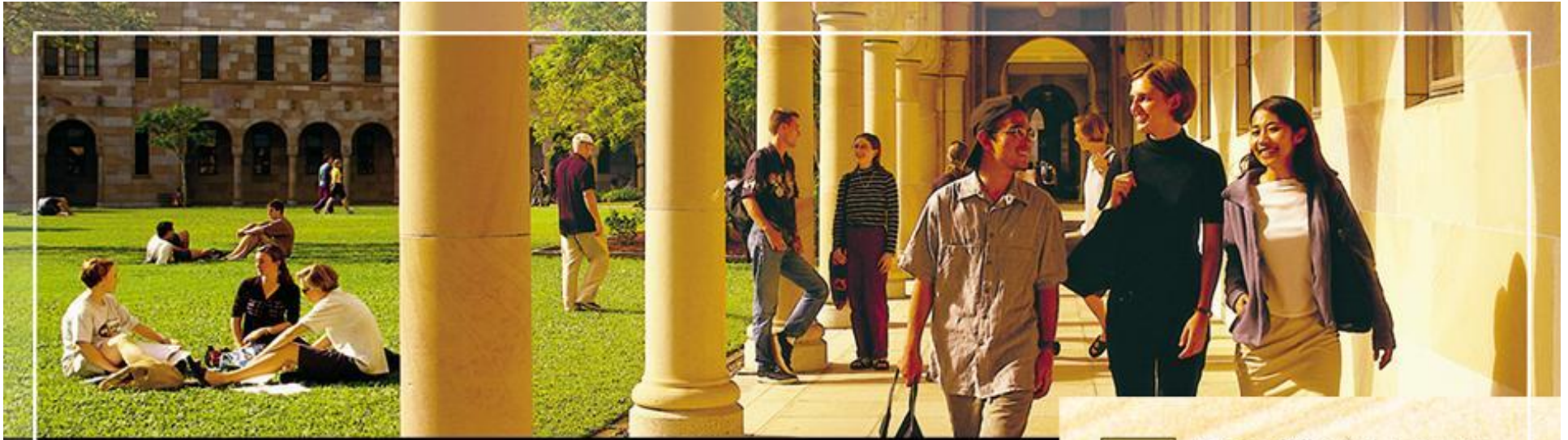
Clarity of Objective



- | Purpose of research with new sample
 - i To test the validity of the existing coding scheme (legitimate only if original sample is diverse or representative)
 - i To answer the same question across multiple populations

Ways to Combine Methods

- | Do both etic and emic approaches separately, sequentially
 - i Something to be learned by comparing results using different frameworks as primary
 - i Time consuming, labor intensive
- | Use etic but allow new categories to emerge where there is not a fit
 - i Pragmatic approach
 - i Good with similar samples over time as it allows for evolution of framework with changing conditions



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A Qualitative Approach to Understanding LMX Relationships

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THE UNIVERSITY
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Defining LMX

- Ø Early empirical work was exploratory, but was quantitative in nature.
- Ø **1972**: used Ohio State measures for “Consideration” and “Initiating Structure” (LBDQ - Behavioral Theory of Leadership) to measure LMX.
- Ø **1973**: added “attention”
- Ø **1975**: added “attraction, loyalty, support”
- Ø **1976**: added “trust”
- Ø **1977**: added “sensitivity, satisfaction”
- Ø **1998**: added “contribution, loyalty, affect, respect” (LMX- MDM scale)
- Ø **1990's** = 6 content sub-dimensions appear predominant: mutual support, trust, liking, latitude, attention, and loyalty (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999).

LMX Operationalization

- Ø A survey of the literature reveals that leader-member exchange has been operationalized in a number of different ways:
 - Ø **2-item** (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975)
 - Ø **4-item** (e.g., Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Liden & Graen, 1980)
 - Ø **5-item** (e.g., Graen, Liden & Hoel, 1982)
 - Ø **7-item** (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Seers & Graen, 1984)
 - Ø **10-item** (Ridolphi & Seers, 1984)
 - Ø **12-item** (Wakabayashi & Graen, 1984)
- Ø None of these scales are based on either systematic psychometric study or explicit construct validation.
- Ø In addition, in several studies (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975; Liden & Graen, 1980) some of the dependent measures appear to be alternative measures of LMX rather than true dependent variables.

LMX 7 (Scandura & Graen, 1984)

1. Do you know where you stand with your leader?
 2. How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?
 3. How well does your leader recognize your potential?
 4. **What are the chances your leader would “bail you out” at his/her expense?**
 5. **What are the chances your leader would help you solve problems in your work?**
 6. I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so.
 7. What is the quality of your working relationship with your leader?
- Ø The most commonly used measure for LMX operationalization (Gerstner & Day, 1997)
- Ø Items **in red** from the earlier Negotiating Latitude scale

LMX-MDM (Liden & Maslyn, 1998)

1. **My supervisor is the kind of person one would like to have as a friend.**
2. **I like my supervisor very much as a person.**
3. **My supervisor is a lot of fun to work with.**
4. **My supervisor defends my work actions to a superior, even without complete knowledge of the issue in question.**
5. **My supervisor would come to my defense if I were “attacked” by others.**
6. **My supervisor would defend me to others in the organization if I made an honest mistake.**

LMX-MDM (Liden & Maslyn, 1998)

7. **I do work for my supervisor that goes beyond what is specified in my job descriptions.**
8. **I am willing to apply extra efforts, beyond those normally required, to meet my supervisor's work goals.**
9. **I do not mind working my hardest for my supervisor.**
10. **I am impressed with my supervisor's knowledge of his/her job.**
11. **I respect my supervisor's knowledge of and competence on the job.**
12. **I admire my supervisor's professional skills.**

Criticisms of LMX Research

- ∅ Assumption that the pre-defined variables, such as LMX relational attributes have the same meaning across different organizational settings, context and cultures (Bartunek & Seo, 2002).
- ∅ Leader and subordinate behaviors involved in the development of LMX relationships have not been empirically delineated (House & Baetz, 1979; Jablin, 1987).
- ∅ Generic quantitative measures involve overly narrow and simplified descriptions that may not adequately represent the deeper structure of interpersonal exchange process (Alvesson, 1996; Hosking, 2002; Sandberg, 2001).
- ∅ No scales (apart from 'Negotiating Latitude') ask about what must be given (exchanged) for the reward or benefit received (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

Aim of the Study

- Ø The fundamental assumptions of ongoing reciprocal LMX relationships are based on how subordinates perceive and experience the exchanges they share with their supervisors – something that is not easily assessable using the standard measures of LMX.
- Ø We aim to advance the research on LMX by exploring how individuals themselves perceive and experience differential relationships with their supervisors using qualitative methods.
- Ø **Research Questions:**
 - Ø How do employees themselves perceive their high-quality and low-quality LMX relationships?
 - Ø What is exchanged during these unique relationships?

Method

Participants

- ∅ 25 full-time employees working within a variety of team settings in a large private health service provider and a medium-sized construction material company.
- ∅ 8 male and 17 female (aged from 20 - 58 years).
- ∅ Sample size was determined by information redundancy and theoretical saturation (Flick, 2002).

Data Collection

- ∅ Interviews using several open-ended questions about their workplace interactions with their supervisors.
- ∅ Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.
- ∅ All interviews were recorded on tapes, and then the content of the tapes were transcribed verbatim (Flick, 2002).

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Ø **Thematic Analysis:** Keywords and phrases of transcripts were compared with each other, and then grouped into themes based on their similarities and differences.
- Ø 2 independent judges coded all identified keywords and phrases extracted from interviews according to the meaning of each specified theme.
- Ø Kappa coefficient was computed as an index of inter-judge reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- Ø The content analysis for the participants' perceptions of LMX relationships yielded a Kappa value of .75 .
- Ø **Content Analysis:** *Leximancer* (Smith, 2000, 2004; see also <http://www.leximancer.com>) used to quantify the keywords.
- Ø *Leximancer* is a lexical computer program that is designed to objectively analyze the content of textual documents. It is initiated with a list of 'seed words' (our list of keywords), and then 'learns' additional coding and adds terms found in the text to create the full thesaurus (Smith, 2000).
- Ø This enabled us to extract meaningful data strands which contained the frequency of each keyword or phrase, and the description of all other information provided by participants.

Findings - Themes

Theme 1: Relationship oriented aspects of LMX

Ø Employees' perceptions of the extent to which they consider their relationships with their supervisors as personal relationships, going beyond their workplace relationships.

1. *“She’s a mentor. It’s a mentoring relationship, a very supportive relationship”*,
2. *“My supervisor places a lot of confidence in me to do my job, even though I haven’t done that particular job”*.
3. *“I think we have a great relationship. We not only work well professionally, but we go out and socialize and stuff like that”*.

Findings - Themes

Theme 2: Task oriented aspects of LMX

- ∅ Employees' perceptions of the task oriented aspects of LMX. These serve as a foundation on which individuals exchange tangible or intangible resources with their supervisors in order to accomplish their assigned tasks (Dansereau et al., 1975).

1. *“I am comfortable that my manager has a lot of knowledge and experience, where I can actually go and get help and assistance”*,
2. *“I feel that there’s no sort of tension or difficulty in me raising any work issues with my boss. I discuss fairly freely work-related problems with her”*.
3. *“We are just having a coffee and we’ll stand around to share ideas”*.

Findings - Frequencies

High-Quality LMX keywords:

Relationship Oriented

- ∅ Helping/caring/concern, supporting each other 106
- ∅ Personal sharing and friendship 89
- ∅ Recognition and appreciation 75
- ∅ Mutual respect and trust 70

Task Oriented

- ∅ Information and idea exchange 87
- ∅ Work-related problem solving 72
- ∅ Good and frequent work communication 68
- ∅ Task requirement/work demands/job responsibility 39

Findings - Frequencies

Low-quality LMX keywords:

Relationship Oriented

- ∅ Little appreciation, care and support 64
- ∅ Lack of trust and respect 68

Task Oriented

- ∅ Task-focused/job related discussion 54
- ∅ Poor work communication, criticism 37

Implications

- ∅ **Thematic analysis and content analysis revealed two dimensions that employees focus on in describing their LMX relationships – task oriented and relationship oriented aspects.**
- ∅ **LMX 7 scale assess a pure work-related exchange relationship between a formal role of supervisor and subordinate. The scale does not truly reflect LMX relationships on a personal level.**
- ∅ **Each LMX relationship is unique**

Limitations and Future Research

- ∅ **Personal biases and subjective preferences could intrude into the process of data collection, data analysis and interpretation (Flick, 2002).**
- ∅ **Did not conduct interviews with supervisors to look at how they perceive, experience and react to the same exchange relationships with their individual subordinates.**
- ∅ **We suggest that future research should attempt to study supervisor-subordinate relationships from both supervisor and subordinates' perspectives using qualitative methods.**

Improving Leadership in University-based Cooperative Research Centers

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Overview

- Background
 - The unique role of CRC directors
 - Project goals
- Study methodology
- Results
- Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative approach to this study

Cooperative Research Centers (CRCs)



- *Independent research units which exist within universities and typically involve industrial affiliates, organized research units, and R&D consortia. (Gray, 1998)*
- **CRC directors must:**
 - Span boundaries across diverse constituencies
 - Coordinate work of experts outside their own fields
 - Motivate others with little formal authority
 - Build/maintain climates for creativity and innovation
 - Operate in time-limited, unstructured organizations
- Little previous research on CRC leadership.

Primary Research Questions & Objectives



Research Questions:

- What are the unique demands placed on CRC directors?
- What KSAOs predict CRC director success?

Project Objectives:

- To identify the leader behaviors and characteristics that predict CRC success.
- To develop an assessment / feedback tool for ongoing performance improvement.

Method

Phase I: Gather Qualitative & Quantitative Data

- Directors of all NSF-funded and graduated CRCs invited to participate
 - Interviews with directors and their constituents
 - Web-based assessment of director personality
 - Review of archival data

Phase II: Data Analysis and Synthesis

- Analyze Data to Develop 360° instrument
- Use 360° instrument to assess directors
- Regression analyses to link director personality to director and center performance
- Give feedback and developmental assistance to directors
- Determine “ideal” director profile

Phase I - Interview Protocols

Examples of questions for directors:

- What factors are most important to your Center's success?
- What factors are most important to your success as director?
- Describe a notable center success.

Examples of questions for observers:

- What are the director's primary strengths and weaknesses?
- How effective is the director at maintaining productive relationships with other people, both inside and outside the center?

Phase II: Data Analysis & Synthesis

Q. How effective is the director at maintaining productive relationships with other people, both inside and outside the center?

R. *"...I think that this is really [the director's] strong point. He maintains just a very extensive network of folks in probably three or four government agencies, with a whole bunch of researchers that he's been working with, and then also with the industrial community. So [the director's] real strength is that he spans all three of those communities."*

R. *"His personal network is almost unlimited. That is definitely one of his strengths is relationships and how he is truly effective accomplishing things because he knows so many people on so many different levels in academia, the government, and industry. And for a center located in a university setting, that's very effective."*

Results

- What strengths enable directors to perform well?
(% of respondents naming; $N_{\text{directors}} = 7$, $N_{\text{observers}} = 3$)
 - *Technical expertise* (70%)
 - *Interpersonal skill*
 - » *listening / seeking input* (30%)
 - » *collaborative / team orientation* (20%)
 - » *able to build consensus* (20%)
 - » *tact, humility, patience also mentioned*
 - *Social capital / network of contacts* (20%)
 - *Competitiveness / ambition* (20%)
 - *Willingness to work hard for long hours* (20%)
 - *Previous job experience* (20%)

Strengths and Weaknesses of Qualitative Research



Strengths:

- Provided insight into leadership in an understudied context.
- Enabled participants to determine the appropriate responses to the questions.
- Provided insight into both person and environmental factors affecting CRC leadership.
- Will enable us to create a 360° instrument customized to the unique challenges of CRC directors.

● **Weaknesses:**

- Process is very time-intensive.
- Limited generalizability to other leadership contexts.
- Recording the interviews may have contributed to lenient responses.

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Engaging Leadership

A Qualitative Study of How Leaders Impact Team Engagement

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

KAPLAN DEVRIES INC.

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Agenda

- Team Engagement
 - Definition
 - Relation to business-unit performance
 - Relation to leadership
- Research questions and study objectives
- Method
- Findings
- Use of qualitative methods in leadership research

Team Engagement

- An individual's involvement in, satisfaction with, and enthusiasm for the processes and issues that are under the influence of the work group's supervisor.
- Antecedent of attitudinal outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, company loyalty)
- Related to several business-unit outcomes:
 - Customer satisfaction/loyalty: $\rho = .33$
 - Productivity: $\rho = .25$
 - Employee turnover: $\rho = -.30$

Source: Harter, 2000; Harter et al., 2002

Leadership & Team Engagement

- Meta-analytic evidence suggests that managerial talent is related to team engagement.
 - ρ 's from .26 to .35.
- Selection and development of effective leaders may raise employee engagement.
- Further, leader behaviors associated with effectiveness vary with organizational level.
 - Do the leader behaviors related to engagement differ by organizational level?

Source: Harter, 2000; Kaiser & Craig, 2004

Research Objectives

- Identify leader behaviors related to engagement.
- Sponsored by Granite Construction Inc.
 - CEO's goal: "To build the most engaged workforce in the industry by 2008."
- Why a qualitative methodology?
 - To replicate the general finding linking leadership to employee engagement by using an exploratory, inductive approach
 - The results were intended to be replicated and confirmed using quantitative methods.
 - Granite preferred to cast the results "in their own language"—qualitative research could be grounded in the local culture

Research Questions

1. Is engagement related to leadership?
2. If so, what specific leader behaviors?
3. Does this vary by organizational level?

Method

Research Design:

- Interview study comparing the leaders of extreme groups
- 50 teams, 3 organizational levels selected based on their Gallup Q12 engagement scores
 - **Team Engagement – Gallup Workplace Audit**
 - “At work, my opinions seem to count.”
 - “At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.”

Participants:

- Two team members randomly selected to be interviewed
- Mean tenure with company = 6.25 years; With manager = 2.5 years

Method

Procedures:

- Brief interviews conducted by trained, professional interviewers (i.e., HR professionals and consultants) off the job site.
- Confidentiality was ensured.
- Structured interviews assessed:
 - Constructive/destructive leader behaviors
 - Impact of leader behaviors on the individual and team
 - Comparisons to former leaders
 - Contextual factors impacting performance
 - Overall leader effectiveness
- Example interview questions:
 - “What do you like the most about how NAME leads your work group?”
 - “What is different about how NAME leads this work group compared to other people you’ve worked for?”
 - What does NAME do that limits you in your job?
 - What other factors, outside of NAME, affect your work group’s performance?

Method

Coding scheme and content analysis:

- “Double-blind” coding procedure of verbatim transcripts
 - Coded for 51 leader behaviors and impact on individuals and team
- Iterative and inductive content analysis:
 - Read five interviews together and discussed themes and emerging patterns.
 - Read 15 additional interviews and revised themes, created definitions, and established coding rules.
 - Calibration with Granite employees.
- Rater agreement: 89%

Recognition	Providing positive reinforcement; acknowledges effort and accomplishment – by expressing appreciation and/or rewarding people for doing a good job	-1: "You never hear it when things go well, only when they don't" +1: "I know he appreciates my efforts;" "lets you know when you do good work"
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Sample Average Q¹² Scores

S **MM** **E**

High Q¹²

4.34

4.41

4.63

Low Q¹²

3.04

3.38

3.25

Note. ANOVA for Level: $F(2, 44) = 9.714, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$.
Rating scale = 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Is engagement related to leadership?

Yes. Overall effectiveness ratings of leaders are significantly related to Q¹² scores.

$N = 40$ teams; $r = .34$, $p < .05$

	S	MM	E
Most engaged Avg. Q ¹²	8.48	8.30	8.40
Least engaged Avg. Q ¹²	7.85	6.20	7.55
Correlation (r)	.39	.45	.36
% of engagement related to leadership	15%	20%	13%

What specific leader behaviors are related to engagement? Do they vary by level?

	S		MM		GM	
	Right Stuff	Wrong Stuff	Right Stuff	Wrong Stuff	Right Stuff	Wrong Stuff
High Q¹²	10.7	1.0	10.9	0.9	11.4	0.3
Low Q¹²	8.0	1.6	5.5	1.0	5.8	0.6

Avg. Number of Behaviors Mentioned per Interview

Note. MANOVA for High/Low: Wilk's Lambda (2, 73) = 10.19, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$.

Comparing High vs. Low Q¹² Teams

- Analyzed differences between Hi/Lo Q¹² leaders on all 51 behaviors
- Separately for S, MM, & E levels
 - 153 tests in all
- Identified "statistically significant" relationships
 - Reviewed each for practical significance
 - Determined which most distinguished hi/lo Q¹² leaders
 - Analyzed the predictive power of each set of behaviors

Sample Contingency Table

Compassionate

		Low Q ¹²	High Q ¹²	Cramer's V	p
S	No	0%	10%	.414	.246
	No mention	90%	50%		
	Yes	10%	30%		
	Overused	0%	10%		
MM	No	5%	0%	.459	.014
	No mention	80%	45%		
	Yes	5%	50%		
	Overused	10%	5%		
E	No	10%	0%	.225	.587
	No mention	70%	80%		
	Yes	20%	20%		
	Overused	0%	0%		

Engaging Behaviors: Supervisor

Uplifting

Emotional support

Positive outlook

Demeaning

Planning/organization

Directive

Engaging Behaviors: Middle Management

Assertive

Taking stands

Directive

Accessible

Available

Visibility

Disengaged

Help doing the work

Providing resources

Task support

Resolves problems

Care about people

Compassionate

Coaching/Development

Fair

Fairness

Playing favorites

Engaging Behaviors: Executive

Empowering

Trusts employees

Considerate

Coaching/Development

Follow up

Performance-focused

Accountability

Demanding

Uplifting

Emotional support

Positive outlook

Engaging Behaviors by Level

Supervisor

4. Directive
28. Planning/
organization
1. Demeaning

Middle Management

2. Providing resources
4. Directive
6. Playing favorites
17. Available

Executive

7. Accountability
11. Trusts employees
30. Follow up
35. Positive outlook

$\chi^2 (8) = 20.3, p < .01$
95%

$\chi^2 (4) = 31.2, p < .001$
85%

$\chi^2 (3) = 23.2, p < .001$
95%

Classification Rates (Predictability)

Can correctly distinguish 72 of 80 interviews

Discussion

1. Engagement is related to leadership.
2. What behaviors are engaging depends on who is being led: it varies by organizational level.
3. Results are consistent with prior empirical work on level differences in leadership effectiveness.

Future Research

- Replicate and extend results using quantitative methods.
- Explicitly consider the role of follower characteristics in team engagement.
 - Organizational level
 - Tenure with manager
 - Does it take longer for destructive leader behaviors to negatively impact engagement?

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