

EMINE GENÇ

# The Effect Of Leader Member Exchange On Individual Performance Of Logistics Employees And The Mediating Role Of Career Satisfaction

## 1. Introduction

The logistics sector is a process that directly meets customer demands through the provision of services such as storage, transportation, customs clearance and packaging (Lu, 2003). In a globalizing world, the development of international trade and economy largely depends on the development of the logistics sector (Chang et al. 2022). Turkey plays an important role in global logistics with its geographical location, advanced transportation infrastructure, large trade volume and dynamic economy. As a strategic bridge between Asia and Europe due to its geopolitical location, Turkey is considered an important transit country in the logistics sector (Ministry of Trade, 2024). A significant portion of logistics businesses operating in Turkey are small and medium-sized enterprises with up to 50 employees (Tanyaş, 2015). Similarly, globally, the logistics industry acts as an area where SMEs generally deliver goods (Chang et al. 2022). Due to the limited size of these businesses, their operations heavily rely on the performance and positive relationships of their employees. Employee

Emine Genç,  
International Trade and Logistics Dept,  
Faculty of Economics  
and Administrative Sciences Bartın  
University, Turkey,  
ORCID: 0000-0003-1178-6929.

initiative and job satisfaction are critical factors in the success of operations (Chang et al., 2022; Kuo et al., 2020). Consequently, the construction of effective service teams is vital for logistics operations (Shang et al., 2024). Since the logistics sector includes complex services, the integration and coordination of services requires a qualified workforce. However, the sector generally neglects the feelings of employees at the expense of customer satisfaction (Son, Kim, and Kim, 2021). An important issue that businesses should not forget is that satisfied employees create satisfied customers. Therefore, increasing employee satisfaction is an important issue in the logistics industry (Chi and Gursoy, 2009; Jung and Yoon, 2013). Given the pivotal role employees play in logistics services, businesses within the logistics sector must focus on improving individual employee performance.

Human beings are inherently social creatures, and interactions with others serve as the foundation for developing relationships. In the context of workplaces, relationships hold particular significance, as the quality of social connections has a profound impact on an organization's culture, overall climate, productivity, and overall success (Scandura, 2022; Gotfredson and Adams, 2020). Within the framework of relationships, which are also pivotal in the realms of leadership and management, it is crucial for effective leaders to nurture and fulfill the relational needs of their followers. Leaders who excel in this aspect tend to be more successful in guiding their organizations and engaging their members (Scandura, 2022). Therefore, in addition to focusing on what leaders do, it is important to adopt a relational perspective to focus on the relationships between leaders and individuals (Lord et al. 2016).

Graen and his colleagues brought a new perspective to the study of leadership in organizations with the theory initially called Vertical Dyadic Linkage Theory (VDL) (Dansereau et al. 1973) and later renamed as Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (Graen et al. 1982). It is based on the understanding that exchanges between resources take place within the formal organizational structure (Cashman et al. 1976) and that leaders develop different relationships with each member during work-related exchanges (Graen and Cashman, 1975; Graen and Scandura, 1987). In the leader-member exchange theory, the one-to-one and differential level of exchange between the leader and the members is an important issue that the traditional understanding of leadership ignores.

LMX theory is one of the most important theories addressing the quality of the relationship between leaders and subordinates. LMX theory suggests that leaders can move from "low quality relationships" with subordinates, characterized by formal interactions with minimal communication and limited

support, to “high quality relationships” with high levels of support, information exchange and trust (Aggarwal et al., 2020). Over the years, extensive research has been conducted on LMX relationships with the aim of comprehending and elucidating the impact of leadership on follower attitudes and performance outcomes within professional environments. Studies rooted in social exchange theory, role theory, relational leadership theory, and the LMX construct have found that when employees perceive high-quality LMX relationships, there is an increase in positive attitudes such as skill development, performance, trust in the organization, and satisfaction, as well as a decrease in negative attitudes such as role conflict, turnover intention, and inefficient performance (Scandura and Meuser, 2022; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Andersen et al. 2020). The results of Shang et al.’s (2024) research with logistics sector employees showed that LMX directly affects employee satisfaction. The results of these studies emphasize the importance of evaluating LMX relationships in organizations (Lommi et al. 2023).

As mentioned above, most of the studies have focused on the organizational and individual outcomes of LMX. When Mdletshe (2023) evaluates the findings of his study with logistics sector employees as a whole, he argues that career studies should be developed as a regulator to improve employee engagement and encourage a more dynamic and productive workforce. This study focuses on the impact of LMX on career satisfaction and the effect of this relationship on individual performance. Career satisfaction is a critical career-related research topic because individuals’ perceptions of success are related to various aspects of psychological well-being and work behavior (Abele and Spurk, 2009; Ng et al. 2005). In their meta-analytic review, according to Ng et al. (2005), the examination of variables forecasting career success has been confined to a restricted set. Additionally, Seibert et al. (2001) have asserted that there exists a scarcity of research investigating the influence of informal interpersonal behaviors on career-related achievements. To respond to these calls, this study examines whether LMX, an important variable related to interpersonal relationships in organizations, can help an individual’s career satisfaction in the organization. My choice of LMX as an antecedent variable affecting employees’ individual performance and career satisfaction is based on the fact that studies have shown LMX as the main cause of employee turnover. For example, Graen et al. (1982) found that Leader-Member Exchange serves as a crucial determinant of real employee turnover. Extensive research has indicated that the cornerstone of talent retention and enhancing the productivity of a talented employee hinges upon the individual’s rapport with

their immediate supervisor. Furthermore, the association between employees and their managers stands as the principal factor propelling their advancement within the organizational hierarchy throughout their career (Buckingham and Coffman, 2014; Dixon-Kheir, 2001).

The logistics sector is a very dynamic sector where competition is strong and change is intense. Changes at national, regional and global levels directly affect the logistics sector (Ellinger and Ellinger, 2013; Loske et al. 2021). Due to the wide and varied activities of the logistics sector worldwide, it is of paramount importance to intervene in the sector with a careful, attentive and anticipatory approach. Depending on the stages and types of business processes in the sector, challenges may arise such as complying with the completion time of the work, following current developments in import and export procedures, complying with time and cultural differences between countries (Nguyen, 2020). As these complex and challenging situations create pressure on employees, there is a need for qualified employees with strong stress management skills (Nguyen, 2023). Research has long indicated that the lack of skilled professionals in the logistics industry is a critical issue that can no longer be ignored (Kam et al. 2010; Ding et al. 2014; Song and Wang, 2009). However, it should be noted that having skilled human resources does not necessarily lead to business success (Mathis and Jackson, 2005), as there are many factors that affect the performance of employees, which in turn affects the ability of the business to achieve its performance objectives (Katou and Budhwar, 2006). The logistics industry is a service industry and involves human interaction. If employees perform their activities based on standard operating procedures, the service will eventually become a standardized product. This will negatively affect customer loyalty in the long run. Therefore, it is important for logistics businesses to recognize the importance of employee performance and to know how to improve employee performance to increase business performance.

Based on the aforementioned reasons, this study aims to reveal the impact of logistics employees' perceptions of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on performance outcomes and to examine the mediating effect of career satisfaction in this relationship. The literature lacks research that investigates the mediating role of career satisfaction between LMX and individual performance. In this context, the study is expected to contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge. The following research questions are addressed in the article: Does the LMX perception of logistics sector employees positively affect their career satisfaction and individual performance? Furthermore, does the career satisfaction of logistics sector employees enhance the effect of LMX on

individual performance? This research aims to provide guidance to managers by identifying variables that can enhance the individual performance of logistics sector employees. Understanding the relationships between these variables will offer substantial benefits to managers.

## 2. Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

### 2.1. Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is a theory developed by Dansereau et al. (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975), influenced by role theory, social exchange theory, and studies on trust, to examine and define the relationships between the leadership process and its outcomes in the field of organizational leadership (Maslyn and Uhl-Bien, 2001; Gerstner and Day, 1997). Originally termed the 'Vertical Dyadic Linkage' model, this theory examines the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers, based on the premise that leaders do not interact equally or similarly with all group members. Instead, these relationships vary between the leader and each member, treating each leader-follower relationship as unique (Liden and Graen, 1980; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Leaders establish relationships with their followers in different ways due to constraints such as time and resources, resulting in varying levels of leader-member exchange quality, known as 'leader-member exchange differentiation' (Truckenbrodt, 2000; Henderson et al., 2009). These relationships are predicated on mutual trust, with high-quality exchanges leading to more productive interactions between leaders and subordinates. Followers who engage in high-quality exchanges with leaders are considered part of the 'in-group,' characterized by trust and relationship-based interactions, while those in low-quality exchanges are considered part of the 'out-group,' characterized by formal, role-defined interactions (Northouse, 2016). In-group members are more proactive in obeying leaders and can fully utilize their skills to complete tasks, whereas out-group members have limited contact with leaders and receive fewer rewards and opportunities (Hu et al., 2018).

LMX enhances leaders' trust in their employees and provides organizational support (Zhou et al., 2021). Maintaining a high-quality relationship with employees involves addressing their needs, listening to their opinions, and crucially, protecting them from all forms of workplace discrimination, including gender stereotypes (Sunaryo et al., 2024)

In the study, LMX is discussed within the scope of social change theory. Social Exchange Theory is recognized as one of the oldest theories of social behavior. It posits that any exchange between individuals is characterized by the exchange of resources (Homans, 1958). These resources encompass not only tangible goods or money but also intangible concepts such as social amenities and friendship. The Social Exchange Theory encompasses the relationships that take place between the parties with the expectation of reward following this exchange (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). In addition, building trust is an important aspect in social exchange, as exchange is largely governed by social obligations rather than contracts (Blau, 1964). In addition, a member's willingness to accept role requirements beyond the criteria defined in the employment contract can also be explained by social exchange (Blau, 1964). The member spends time and effort to fulfill the leader's role demands with the expectation of receiving reciprocity from the leader (Eisenberger et al. 1987). When followers receive favorable treatment from their leader, it instills in them a sense of duty to reciprocate by investing their efforts diligently. Furthermore, positive interactions between leaders and followers foster sentiments of fondness and affinity towards the leader, consequently motivating followers to fulfill the leader's job expectations. This, in turn, should lead to an enhancement in both task-related and contextual performance (Martin et al. 2016).

## 2.2. Career Satisfaction

Career is the evaluation and accumulation of various work experiences over a lifetime (Hall and Las Heras, 2010), a series of lifelong work-related engagements (Mathis and Jackson, 2005). Career satisfaction pertains to the level of contentment or discontentment experienced by individuals concerning their careers. Additionally, Career satisfaction pertains to the subjective assessment of one's career success, as articulated by Kang et al. (2015), as well as Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera (2010). And, career satisfaction covers individuals' perceptions of the accumulative effect of experience from a range of jobs and progress attained in a certain period of time (Al-Ghazali and Shoil, 2021). Career satisfaction is an indicator of employees' happiness about their way of managing their own careers, and this strongly determines whether employees want to remain employed in the organization (Dubbelt et al., 2019). Career satisfaction represents an individual's perspective on their present occupational status. In this context, career satisfaction can be elucidated through two dimensions. The first dimension

relates to individuals' career accomplishments and their contentment with their career paths. The second dimension pertains to employees' perceptions and expectations concerning the career progression they aspire to attain within their respective organizations (Sakal and Yıldız, 2015).

Recent advancements in career theory underscore the importance of examining both the objective and subjective dimensions of individuals' career trajectories, alongside their perceptions and experiences over time. Scholars argue that a comprehensive career theory must account for the impact of personal factors—such as relationships and education—as well as contextual factors—including industry dynamics and political influences (Ng et al., 2005; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Levy (2015) found that enjoyment of work emerged as the only component significantly related to career satisfaction. This finding emphasizes the importance of creating a positive and pleasant working environment to increase career satisfaction.

According to Burke (1989), career satisfaction can be defined as the cognitive and emotional state in which an employee reflects upon and evaluates their present job or occupation. According to another definition, CS is the internal satisfaction of an employee's individual career within an organization resulting from internal and external factors (Judge et al. 1995). Lepnurm et al. (2006), who conducted research on career satisfaction, state that this concept is affected by many factors such as family responsibilities, stress, service quality level, and wages. In addition, it is also accepted that many factors such as gender differences, career level, individual differences, the quality of the work, the attitudes of managers, income level, education level affect career satisfaction (Çelik, 2012). On the other hand, Greenhaus et al. (1990) made a general evaluation on career satisfaction in a study and stated that professional achievements, common goals, income goals, professional development and acquisition of skills affect career satisfaction. Goffnett et. al. (2012) identified the determinants of career satisfaction in supply chain management as "challenge, variety, opportunity, relevance, positive culture, and remuneration and recognition" in order of importance.

### **2.3. Individual Performance**

Performance can be characterized as the extent of achievement attained by an individual as a result of the collective endeavors invested in the fulfillment of their job responsibilities. An individual's performance is contingent upon their qualifications, competencies, as well as their personal beliefs and values

(Morillo, 1990). In this respect, individual performance is open to change and influence. Individual performance is a multidimensional construct that has been extensively studied in organizational psychology. It refers to an individual employee's level of productivity relative to peers in terms of various work-related behaviors and outcomes (Babin and Boles, 1998). Individual performance refers to the effectiveness with which employees fulfill their assigned roles within an organization. It not only reflects each employee's competencies and contributions but also highlights the necessity of regular evaluations to promote ongoing improvement and development (Campbell and Wiernik, 2015; Ramawickrama et al., 2017).

Individual performance can be conceptualized as the array of competencies employed by an individual to attain the objectives set by an organization. These competencies encompass not only job-specific tasks but also extend to non-job-related responsibilities and behaviors. Competencies that are not directly job-oriented include teamwork, customer orientation, willingness and enthusiasm, helpfulness, embracing the corporate culture and individual discipline. Competence is the degree to which a person can realize business objectives (McGrath et al., 1995). Individual performance, which is defined as the effort that employees make and show in order to perform their jobs and, as a result, the degree to which they perform their duties and achieve their goals, is very important for organizational performance. Because organizations will be as good as the performance of their employees (Çöl, 2008).

#### **2.4. The Relationship Between Leader-Member Exchange, Career Satisfaction and Individual Performance**

The central tenet of LMX theory is the cultivation of unique, reciprocal, and mature relationships between leaders and each of their individual followers, characterized by attributes such as partnership and friendship. These relationships are considered integral components of effective leadership processes, ultimately enhancing the likelihood of achieving desired organizational outcomes (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, the establishment of high-quality relationships between employees and their leaders exerts a significant influence on work-related performance outcomes (Janssen and Van Yperen, 2004). The rapport between leaders and their team members holds pivotal importance in determining employee performance (Gerstner and Day, 1997), as it impacts organizational behaviors such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction.



In contrast to the prevailing notion in much of contemporary leadership literature, which posits that leaders typically employ a uniform leadership style across all employees (Liden and Graen, 1980), Leader-Member Exchange theory asserts that leaders cultivate distinct and varying relationships with individual subordinates (Sparrowe and Liden, 1997; Graen and Cashman, 1975; Dansereau et al. 1975). This leads to a significant increase in the individual performance of employees who receive more attention and support from their leaders (Schaufeli et al. 2006; Dunegan et al. 2002). Employees who had high exchange with their leaders felt supported by their managers and demanded more responsible tasks from their superiors. Employees who perceive themselves as being supported by their leaders and as having a significant role within the organization tend to exhibit higher levels of performance. Empirical research consistently demonstrates a positive and substantial correlation between leader-member exchange and individual performance (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Wang et al. 2008; Liao et al. 2024; Joiner et al. 2023). LMX enhances individual performance through the psychological empowerment of employees (Furtado and Sobral, 2023). It is also plausible to consider that performance has an impact on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) or that there exists a reciprocal relationship between the two variables (Nahrgang et al. 2009). Hence, it is of significance to investigate the directional influence between LMX and performance (Martin et al. 2016). In this context, the first hypothesis of the study is hypothesized as follows:

H1: LMX is positively related to employee's individual performance.

LMX theory suggests that the relationship between leaders and subordinates enhances job performance through positive attitudes such as increasing job satisfaction (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Gerstner and Day, 1997), strengthening positive organizational commitment and increasing career success (Razzak et al. 2023; Seibert et al. 2001).

When high quality LMX relationships are developed in organizations, both individual employees and organizations gain significant advantages. Therefore, the type of individuals selected by leaders for high quality LMX and the nature of the relationship to be developed accordingly are very important. Employees who develop good relationships with their leaders will experience high levels of career satisfaction through access to information and resources as well as career sponsorship from their leaders (Seibert et al.

2001). Career satisfaction, which can be defined as the long-term satisfaction of employees with their career (Salleh et al. 2020; Seibert et al. 2001), is influenced by many variables, but it is positively affected by high LMX levels (Chung and Jeon, 2020; Gillet et al. 2022). In line with these findings, this study hypothesizes that:

H2: LMX is positively related to employee's career satisfaction.

Career satisfaction is a metric that assesses employees' contentment regarding various aspects of their job, encompassing its overall significance, prospects for advancement, income generation, and acquisition of new expertise (Spurk et al. 2020). This facet of satisfaction holds significance not just for individual job performance but also profoundly impacts the organization as a whole. Stanley (2016) affirmed that employees who experience career satisfaction play a pivotal role in fostering organizational success. Mutua (2022) found that career management practices consisting of career planning, career training, career counseling and succession planning explained 46.7% of the change in organizational performance in logistics enterprises. Many studies have emphasized that career satisfaction is an important factor in achieving organizational goals through individual performance (Inuwa, 2016; Loi and Ngo, 2010; Nisar and Rasheed, 2020). Dubbelt et al. (2020) found that low career satisfaction decreases employees' job performance. Based on these results, the following assumption was made in the study:

H3: Career satisfaction is positively related to individual performance.

Employees who cultivate positive relationships with their managers tend to demonstrate increased job commitment and reduced turnover intentions (Yasin et al. 2023). These attributes of high commitment and diminished turnover intentions, which bear paramount importance for both individual employees and their employers, may also be correlated with employees' perceptions of career success (Rawashdeh and Tamimi, 2020). Such perceptions of career success among employees are contingent on their levels of job and career satisfaction, which hold significance not only for individual employees but also for their respective organizations, as they foster heightened employee engagement (Saks, 2022) and contributes to organizational performance by increasing productivity

(Wang et al. 2008). The main idea of LMX theory is that through different types of exchange, leaders differ in the way they treat their followers (Dansereau et al. 1975), which leads to different quality relationships between the leader and each follower (Martin et al. 2016). In a high LMX relationship, the follower has the opportunity to have a one-to-one subjective relationship with the leader about his/her career. An employee who is not satisfied with his/her career will not perform at the desired level even if he/she has established a high quality LMX relationship.

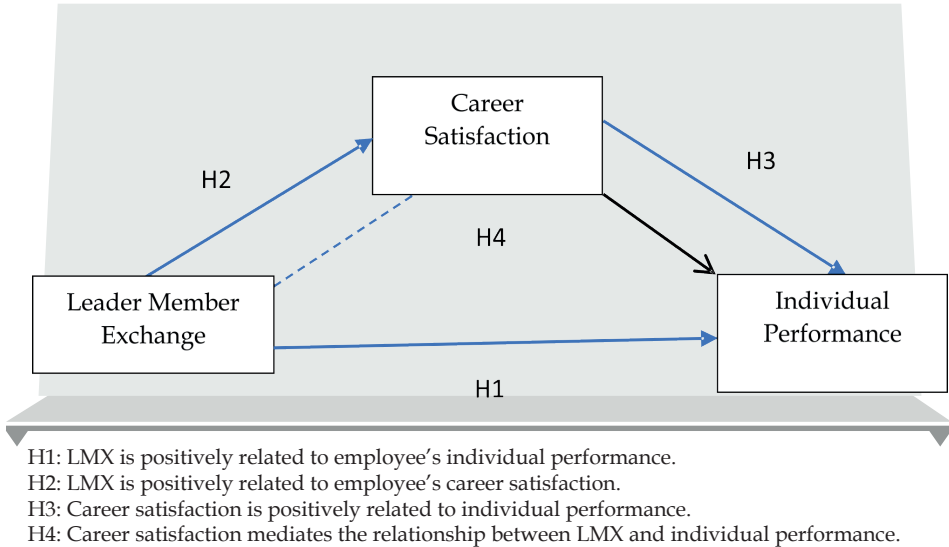
Little research has been conducted on potential mediators between LMX and performance. Although LMX theory has strong theoretical foundations, it is not clear what the specific mediating mechanisms between LMX and performance are (Martin et al. 2016). When Mdletshe (2023) evaluates the findings of his study with logistics sector employees as a whole, he argues that career studies should be developed as a regulator in order to improve employee engagement and encourage a more dynamic and productive workforce. Based on this points and considering the above explanations together, the following assumption was made in the study:

H4: Career satisfaction mediates the relationship between LMX and individual performance.

### **3. Methodology of the Research**

#### **3.1. Purpose and Model of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to uncover the impact of logistics sector employees' perceptions of leader-member interaction on performance outcomes, and additionally to examine the mediating effect of career satisfaction on this relationship. Within this scope, the study aims to investigate the connection between LMX, career satisfaction, and individual performance variables in a sample of logistics sector employees. In the study, the relational survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, and the questionnaire technique were used to collect the data. The research includes 3 variables and 4 hypotheses. To present the research hypotheses and correlations between variables in accordance with a theoretical framework, the following model has been designed (figure 1).



**Figure 1. The theoretical research model**

Source: own study

### 3.2. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows 24.0 (IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and AMOS 24.0 (Analysis of Moment Structures) statistical software. The analysis was conducted with a 95% confidence interval and a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . Descriptive statistical methods, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed for data evaluation. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was utilized to assess structural validity. The reliability of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. The mediating effect of career satisfaction between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and individual performance was examined following the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). Additionally, the mediation effect was tested using the Sobel Test.

### 3.3. Participants and Procedure

The population of the study consists of the employees of logistics sector enterprises operating in Turkey. Since the logistics sector still has a labor-

intensive structure despite the changes and developments in the context of technological developments and is a neglected area in the organizational behavior literature despite its economic importance, the population of the study was determined as logistics sector employees. In the study, the convenience sampling method, one of the non-probability sampling methods, was used and 430 employees were reached by distributing questionnaire forms both physically and electronically. However, a sample size of 409 people was obtained at an analyzable level. Participants were asked to sign (and in the case of online surveys, confirm) a consent form explaining the purpose and procedures of the study before participating in the survey. Participants were assured of anonymity as their identity information was not requested. The survey was conducted between May 12, 2023 and September 25, 2023. The demographic distribution of the participants is presented in table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Participants (n= 409)**

Variable		f	%
Gender	Female	125	30.6
	Male	284	69.4
Age	Under 25 years old	139	34.0
	25-30 years old	147	35.9
	31-35 years old	48	11.7
	36-40 years old	37	9.0
	41-45 years old	19	4.6
	46 years and older	19	4.6
Marital Status	Single	273	66.7
	Married	136	33.3
Education	High school and below	52	12.7
	Bachelor's Degree	63	15.4
	Master's Degree	245	59.9
	PhD	49	12.0

Duration of current job	Less than 5 years	312	76.3
	5-10 years	75	18.3
	11-15 years	15	3.7
	16-20 years	3	0.7
	21 years and above	4	1.0

Source: own study

Of the participants, 69.4% are male, 30.6% are female, 34% are under the age of 25, 35.9% are between the ages of 25-30, 11.7% are between the ages of 31-35, 9% are between the ages of 36-40, 4.6% are between the ages of 41-45, and 4.6% are over the age of 46. In terms of marital status, 66.7% of the participants are single and 33.3% are married. Regarding education, 59.9% are bachelor's degree holders and 12% have a postgraduate degree. As for employment duration, 76.3% have been working at their current workplace for less than 5 years, and 18.3% have been working there between 5 to 10 years (table 1).

### 3.4. Measurement Tools

#### 3.4.1. LMX

The "Leader-Member Exchange Scale (LMX-7)" developed by Graen and Scandura (1987), which is the most widely used scale in the literature, was used to measure the quality of employees' relationship with their leaders. The statements in the scale include elements such as the effectiveness of work relationships between leaders and subordinates, understanding of work-related problems and needs, awareness of personal potential, and willingness to support employees (Maslyn and Uhl-Bien, 2001). Sample items are "my manager understands my problems and needs". The scale has 7 items, a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) and a unidimensional structure. The average of the participants' responses indicates the quality of the subordinates' exchange with their leaders. Higher scores indicate that the quality of leader-member exchange is high. In studies conducted in Turkey, it has been found that the factorial structure of this scale has a single-factor structure compatible with its original structure and its reliability is 0.90 and above (Eryilmaz et al. 2017). In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha value of the

scale was 0.93. The confirmatory factor analysis results of the scale were CMIN/df= 3.90, GFI= 0.97, RMSEA= 0.084, CFI= 0.98, AGFI= 0.92, NFI= 0.98. According to these findings, it can be stated that the unidimensional and 7-item structure of the scale was confirmed.

### 3.4.2. Career Satisfaction

The Career Satisfaction Scale developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990) and adapted into Turkish by Çamur (2019) was used to measure the participants' career satisfaction levels. The scale has 5 items, 5-point Likert type (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) and is unidimensional. The higher the score obtained from the scale, the higher the level of career satisfaction of the individual. In the scale, career satisfaction is addressed through five different situations. These are; achieving career success, general career goals, income goals, promotion goals and the level of achieving goals for developing new skills (Çamur, 2019). In the study, the Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale was 0.86. The confirmatory factor analysis results of the scale were CMIN/df= 1.81, GFI= 0.99, RMSEA= 0.045, CFI= 0.99, AGFI= 0.97, NFI= 0.99. According to these findings, it can be said that the unidimensional and 5-item structure of the scale was confirmed, the scale met the desired reference values and was valid (Kline, 2014) and reliable (Büyüköztürk, 2014) enough to be used in the research.

### 3.4.3. Individual Performance

The "Individual Performance Scale" used to measure participants' perceptions of individual performance consists of 4 statements developed by Kirkman (1999) and adapted into Turkish by Çöl (2008). The scale is 5 items, 5-point Likert type (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) and unidimensional. An increase in the score obtained from the scale indicates that the individual's individual performance is high. In the study, the Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale was 0.93. The confirmatory factor analysis results of the scale were CMIN/df= 0.15, GFI= 1.00, RMSEA= 0.00, CFI= 1.00, AGFI= 0.99, NFI= 1.00. According to these findings, it can be said that the unidimensional and 4-item structure of the scale was confirmed, the scale met the desired reference values and was valid (Kline, 2014) and reliable (Büyüköztürk, 2014) enough to be used in the research.

#### 4. Findings

The mean, standard deviation and correlation values of the research variables are presented in Table 2. Accordingly, the participants' mean LMX is 3.85, mean CS is 3.80 and mean IP is 4.34. It can be said that the participants' perceptions of individual performance are high, while their levels of leader-member exchange and career satisfaction are at a medium level. There is a positive correlation relationship between the variables at a high level of  $p < 0.01$ . Accordingly, the LMX level of the participants increases their career satisfaction and individual performance, and career satisfaction increases their individual performance.

**Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation Values**

Variables	Average	Standard Deviation	1	2	3
1.LMX	3.85	0.51	1		
2.CS	3.80	0.43	0.490**	1	
3.IP	4.34	0.43	0.526**	0.477**	1

\*\* $p < 0.01$

Source: own study

The mediating effect of career satisfaction between LMX and individual performance was tested by adopting the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). When the regression results in table 3 are analyzed, there is a positive relationship between LMX and individual performance ( $\beta = 0.526$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). There is a positive relationship between CS and individual performance ( $\beta = 0.477$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). When CS is added to the relationship between LMX and individual performance, the effect of LMX is still significant but its effect is weakened ( $\beta = 0.385$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that CS has a partial mediation effect between LMX and IP. The significance of the partial mediation effect was also tested with the Sobel Test. If the reduction detected as a result of the test is not significant, partial mediation between the variables cannot be mentioned (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). As a result of the Sobel test, it was determined that the partial mediation effect was significant ( $z = 8.19$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, all hypotheses are supported in this study.



**Table 3. Regression Analysis Results**

Independent Variables	Column 1 DV= CS	Column 2 DV= Individual Performance	Column 2 DV=Individual Performance	Column 3 DV= Individual Performance (Controlling for CS)
LMX	0.490**		0.526**	0.385**
CS		0.477**		0.288**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.240	0.227	0.277	0.340
Adjusted R2	0.239	0.226	0.275	0.337
F	128.84**	119.81**	155.81**	104.543**
Notes: Standardized coefficients (betas) are reported; **p<0.01				

Source: own study

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study examines the network of relationships between leader-member exchange (LMX), career satisfaction and individual performance based on social exchange theory. The starting point of the study is the assumption that when employees tend to have higher quality communication with their managers and this is supported by career satisfaction, the individual performance of employees will increase significantly. The sample of the study consists of 409 employees in the logistics sector in Türkiye. This should be taken into account when interpreting and generalizing the findings and results of the research.

The findings showed that employees in high quality LMX relationships have higher career satisfaction and individual performance. As a result, logistics sector employees with higher quality LMX relationships tend to have a more positive view of job and career outcomes. Similar findings were also revealed by Young et al. (2021), Raghuram et al. (2017).

Renee et al. (2007) argued that employers, organizations and stakeholders need to think and develop strategies to improve career satisfaction and that this will benefit not only individuals but also organizations. Loi and Ngo (2010) emphasized that the strategy of maintaining career satisfaction is important

for both employees and employers and helps organizations to achieve their goals and objectives. Career satisfaction is important for employees and low career satisfaction decreases employees' job performance. Employees who are dissatisfied with their careers are constantly changing jobs, which increases the turnover rates of logistics businesses and damages the businesses. According to a study conducted in Turkey in 2015, the logistics sector ranks first with 53% of the employee turnover rate caused by employee turnover including all reasons among all sectors (Peryon, 2015). Due to the fact that the majority of employees in the logistics sector are young adults, it is known that if career opportunities are not provided together with other factors (difficulty and flexibility of working conditions, uncertainty of working hours, etc.), employees' motivation decreases and their tendency to leave their jobs increases. Logistics managers should increase employees' career satisfaction by providing opportunities to support their career development. This not only improves retention rates but also contributes to the overall success of the business. Based on the findings of this study, it can be argued that the gains that logistics sector employees achieve through high quality LMX relationships (primary relationships based on love, respect, positive feedback, higher share of organizational resources, opportunity to have critical information, etc.) are a strong factor in increasing logistics sector employees' career satisfaction and significantly increasing their performance.

The findings of the study showed that career satisfaction has a partial mediating effect on LMX in enhancing logistics sector employee performance. As a result, high quality LMX relationships together with career satisfaction of the employees increase their job performance. Employees' satisfaction with their professional life significantly affects their commitment to work and the future of the organization. From this point of view, ensuring career satisfaction of employees contributes to their high job satisfaction. Employees who are not satisfied with their careers have feelings of dissatisfaction, boredom and monotony towards work. These feelings may cause individuals to fail and underperform in the organization. At the same time, the work performance of employees who have low quality communication with their leaders decreases significantly. Recently, work-life balance has increasingly become a concern for all employees in the organization. Employees are increasingly drawn into situations where they have to work longer and longer hours and experience less and less satisfying work-life balance (Meenakshi et al. 2013).

Managers need to find ways to communicate effectively with their staff; it is important that they understand employees' wants, needs and views on

working conditions and build positive interpersonal relationships with them. An employee who is motivated by high leader-member exchange and career success opportunities and who possesses relevant competencies is able to apply their skills and abilities to their work. On the other hand, in the new digital world, there is an increasing need for well-educated, self-managed, career-satisfied employees who are dedicated to their work, who have the spirit of leadership, and who can provide added value to the organization and the economy. In this context, considering the findings of this study, it can be said that organizational success is directly proportional to the performance of employees, and the performance of employees is directly proportional to the harmony and career satisfaction of leaders and employees in their mutual interactions (LMX). This is because a high quality LMX relationship directly affects many business resources - salary, rewards, bonuses, promotion opportunities, job security, important information, participation in the decision-making process, etc. - that will increase employees' commitment to work. The gains that employees will achieve through the LMX relationship will also provide a significant increase in their performance along with career satisfaction. In this respect, based on the findings of the study, LMX and career satisfaction can be interpreted as important antecedents in increasing the individual performance of employees.

### 5.1. Theoretical Contributions

There is no study in the literature in which the variables used in the study are included together. Explaining the relationship in a different perspective by adding a new mediator or moderator variable to the relationships previously explained in the literature contributes theoretically to the literature. In this context, the research was tested on different samples by expanding the previous research and contributed to the literature by revealing the mediating effect of employee participation in decisions on the relationship between leader-member interaction and employees' innovation behavior and career satisfaction. In addition, considering the research gap on human factors in the logistics sector (Ellram and Murfield, 2019; Garg et al. 2021), the study on logistics sector employees contributed to the literature.

Implementing an LMX supportive culture in logistics firms means recognizing and developing individuals' personal and professional lives, which in turn supports their professional performance and development by increasing their career satisfaction. The retention of skilled employees is important for logistics

firms and supports the reduction of costs by increasing productivity and efficiency. Overall, findings in the literature indicate that LMX quality is a significant factor in employee outcomes and that developing positive relationships between leaders and employees can provide substantial benefits for both individuals and organizations (Bauer and Erdogan, 2015; Furtado and Sobral, 2023). Logistics companies form the backbone of many industries, ensuring that operations proceed correctly and on time. However, in the absence of an effective internal communication system, employees may feel isolated, which can subsequently reduce productivity and revenue (Garg et al. 2021).

The results of the research show that the quality of the interaction between leaders and their employees makes them feel more successful in their careers. In response to the resources that leaders offer to their employees and the opportunities they share with them, the employee will enter the process of reciprocating to the leader, and in this process will perform more and work harder. Thus, the employee who achieves career satisfaction will develop a higher quality relationship with the leader and his/her individual performance will increase significantly.

Improving individual performance is important not only for the individual's performance but also for the organization. Although there are many variables that affect individual performance, this study concluded that career satisfaction and LMX relationships increase individual performance. In support of this, Stanley (2016) confirmed that employees who are satisfied with their careers contribute to individual performance and thus to organizational performance. Logistics firms should strengthen the appropriate factors to increase the career satisfaction of their employees who can contribute to organizational success in the long run, managers should establish quality communication with their employees and support employee development. When the needs of employees are aligned with the organization, the overall performance of logistics firms will increase significantly.

## 5.2. Managerial Implications

The research also has important implications for practice. Logistics firms that increase the career satisfaction of their employees have highly motivated employees who effectively contribute to achieving organizational goals. Employees with high quality leader-member interaction and career satisfaction have higher job performance. In high quality LMX relationships, employees feel they have the support, resources, feedback and communication they need to

succeed and advance in their careers. When leaders encourage subordinates by creating the perception that they are important members of the organization, subordinates feel respected and trusted and are motivated to put in more effort.

In today's working and living conditions, some logistics sector employees feel only compulsive loyalty to their workplace and work to survive. However, both the employee and business managers have important duties in terms of seeing their job as a purpose and career development. A logistics employee who advances in his/her career and is satisfied with his/her job can make a great contribution to the organization. However, the achievement of the employee's career goal may also depend on a healthy communication process with the leader, sharing and learning.

Logistics employees who have quality interactions with their leaders have more positive emotions, are more engaged in their work and feel more connected to the organization. It should be noted that high quality leader-member exchange is associated with various positive job outcomes (individual performance, career satisfaction, commitment to the organization, work engagement, etc.) as well as reducing negative job outcomes (turnover intention, role conflict, role ambiguity, burnout, etc.). Logistics employees with high career satisfaction are individuals who aim for change and development, have high performance, motivation and self-efficacy. In addition, these employees can interact better with their leaders, show more effort in organizations and have low turnover intentions.

Managers in the logistics sector need to have strategies to manage not only the technical but also the human side of their employees. It is important for managers to take actions to increase the career satisfaction of their employees by taking into account the great change in career development and organizational structures in the sector. Logistics industry employees are the most valuable resources of the supply chain due to the importance of logistics processes and activities. Therefore, businesses take into account employee satisfaction and attitude towards work (Zivkovic et al., 2021). In addition, employees play an important role in contributing to organizational performance (success) depending on their job performance. For these reasons, logistics businesses need to play a role in keeping the performance of their employees at the expected standard. Managers should support employees' career satisfaction practices and personal development plans. Logistics industry employees are one of the most important sources of sustainable competitive advantage based on individual effectiveness, innovation and creativity.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This research has some limitations. The fact that the research was conducted in the logistics sector and other sectors were not included in the scope of the research is considered as an important limitation of the research. For this reason, including different sectors in different regions in other studies that will follow this study may differentiate the results obtained from this study. Another limitation is the limited number of independent variables examined in this study. There are many other factors that contribute to job performance problems. Among the variables addressed in the studies, there are no variables that reveal the characteristics of national culture or organizational culture. In future studies, cultural variables can be added to the model and the relationships can be examined. It is thought that a large-scale study including more factors is needed to reveal the real picture of the problems. In future studies to be conducted in parallel with this study, it may be suggested to the researchers to investigate the effects of different variables affecting job performance by analyzing the data obtained from enterprises in different sectors, at different scales and with different organizational cultures, and to provide a broader perspective on the subject.

#### Abstract

Employees' individual performance is influenced by many factors, and empirical studies in various cultures and sectors are conducted on this subject. There is a need for empirical research to identify the predictive factors of individual performance in different cultures and sectors. In this study, the factors affecting employees' individual performance were examined based on Social Exchange Theory. In this context, the purpose of the study is to reveal the effect of logistics sector employees' perceptions of leader-member exchange on performance outcomes and to examine the mediating effect of career satisfaction on this relationship. Quantitative research methods have been used in the study.

It was conducted through a survey on a sample of logistics sector employees (n= 409) operating in Türkiye. In the study, it was determined that employees with high leader-member exchange have high career satisfaction and individual performance, and career satisfaction has a partial mediating effect on the effect of LMX on individual performance. Accordingly, the effects of

LMX on individual performance can be enhanced mainly by improving career satisfaction. Since career satisfaction ensures that employees are satisfied not only with their jobs but also with their career development, the positive impact of this satisfaction on individual performance is significant. Therefore, it is critical for the success of the organization that logistics firm managers give importance to the career development of their employees and be supportive in this regard. Limitations, future research directions and theoretical and practical implications are discussed at the end of the study.

**Keywords:** *Leader-Member Exchange, Career Satisfaction, Individual Performance, Social Exchange Theory, Logistics Sector Employees.*

**JEL Code:** M10, M12, M54.

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