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THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN THE EFFECT OF LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE ON PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose- It is known that research assistants are in constant interaction with their advisors on various issues related to their thesis processes and other academic studies as well as their administrative work during their academic development. The literature has some studies on the factors that increase the performance of research assistants in these processes, as well as on the factors that adversely affect their performance. At this point, the quality of the research assistants' relationships with their advisors and their level of identification with the university they work for can affect their academic and administrative performances. Accordingly, the study aims to investigate the mediating role of organizational identification in the effect of the quality of the relationship between research assistants and their advisors on their performance.
Methodology- Research data were collected from research assistants working for public universities in Turkey. With 201 completed questionnaires, the model with mediation analysis was tested by the researchers, based on the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4 software. Also, descriptive data were analyzed by SPSS 25 software.
Findings- The results of the research reveal that LMX influences research assistants' job performance via their advisors. In addition, organizational identification has a partial mediating role in the effect of research assistants' relationship with their advisors on their job performance.
Conclusions- It is considered that research assistants' quality relations with their advisors, as well as identification with the universities they work for, can be significantly beneficial to their job performance. The study is expected to contribute performance determinants of research assistants. Future studies can be carried out on mediation effects by adding different variables to the model.

Keywords: Leader-member exchange, organizational identification, job performance, research assistants, PLS-SEM.
JEL Codes: C12, D23, M10

1. INTRODUCTION

Most theories that have been used to describe leadership in the organization have taken the macroscopic approach where a leader's leadership style is considered in light of how it impacts his subordinates in their entirety. All the employees are thought of as having a similar relationship with the leader based on his leadership style. In these approaches, very little attention is given to the bilateral relations that exist in these situations. However, in modern organizational studies that consider the strategic contribution of employees, there is a more microscopic approach to this understanding in which the interaction and communication between the leader and his subordinates are integral to understanding the relationship. Leader-member exchange (LMX) is a social interaction process that represents the mutual interaction that develops between the leader and his employees. The theory argues that the nature and quality of the exchange between the leader and his subordinates will always be different since the leader may establish a more sincere and high-quality relationship with some subordinates and a lower exchange relationship with others, due to certain factors. (Yukl et al., 2009).

LMX is much less concerned with the success of a leader than what goes into the communication, relationship, and general reciprocity that develops between the leader and his subordinates over time. A high-quality exchange is based on mutual respect, trust, and appreciation. At this level, the leader tends to give their followers more responsibilities and various tasks that are generally in the form that subordinates desire to perform. In return, subordinates anticipate trust, respect, and loyalty from their superiors. On the other hand, when the interaction relationship does not have strong qualities, subordinates prefer to perform only tasks outlined in their job description and take no additional duties or responsibilities (Mahsud et al., 2010). Employees with whom the leader has a high-quality relationship are "in-group"; Employees with whom they have low-quality relationships are defined as "out of the group".

The efficiency of leadership in this theory is based on the quality of the interaction. A leader who has a high-quality interaction with his subordinates will be more effective in inspiring and motivating his subordinates than leaders who do not have this type of relationship and cannot establish strong interaction relationships (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is the inspiration drawn from such a high-quality interaction that has been tied to the performance of employees in many leadership formats. The extant literature contains LMX studies concerning various organizational outcomes including performance (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999), identification (Loi et al., 2014), commitment (Lee, 2005), and employee creativity (Tierney et al., 1999), satisfaction (Graen et al., 1982), organizational identification (OI) (Çankır and Palalar Alkan, 2018) among others.

OI is a term used when there is complete integration between the values and aims of the employee and the organization. Mael and Ashforth (1992) define it as a perception by the employees as having a sense of belonging to the organization and adopting the successes and failures of the organization as their successes and failures. At a deeper level, an emotional attachment is formed between the employee and the organization to the extent that the employee sees their future tied to that of the organization and is willing to subordinate their goals to those of the organization in cases where there is an overlap.

OI rises from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, John, 2004) which is the knowledge that an individual subscribes to a social group from which they derive the concept of meaning and value (Hogg and Reid, 2006). In other words, the norms and values an individual possesses are often derived from those of the social group they belong to. The level of OI determines the extent of psychological integration between the employees and their organizations. This influences the degree to which employees are satisfied with the activities of the organization and impacts how hard they are willing to exert themselves to achieve the goals of the organization. High OI has been associated with many favourable outcomes for the individual and the organization including low intention to leave, high job satisfaction, improved performance, increased motivation, and less absenteeism.

Research assistants are the faculty members who have the closest experience of the superior-subordinate relationship in the academy due to the relationship between them and their advisors. Based on the predictors of job performance, it is thought that two of the factors that enable research assistants to reach a certain performance are the quality of their relations with their advisors and the degree of identification with the university they work for. The quality of their relationships with their advisors can cause research assistants to become cynical (Kasalak and Aksu, 2014) as well as trigger an increase in their job performance (Deconinck, 2011). In addition, it is stated that the advisors can increase the performance of the research assistants by making the working environment more suitable (Kandemir and Özdaşlı, 2019). In addition, research assistants can serve in different institutions for a certain period as personnel assigned to carry out their postgraduate education in the context of Turkey. Therefore, for research assistants, the quality of their advisor relationships and their identification with their institutions attain importance in terms of their job performance. According to the data from the Council of Higher Education in Turkey, the number of research assistants working at universities as of 2022 is 52396 and this number constitutes 28 percent of all academic staff in Turkey (YÖK, 2022). Building on the theoretical background, the following research question about the performance of research assistants, who constitute a large part of the faculty members in our country lead the current study:

- Does organization identification mediate the relationship between advisor-researcher assistant exchange and performance?

In this study, OI was examined as a mediator in the relationship between LMX and Performance. The remainder of the study is organized as follows: The literature review is given in the following section followed by the methodology. And while section four presents the results of this study, the last section discusses the results and presents its conclusions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Job Performance

Job performance can be expressed as the extent to which employees have accomplished which task in a given time and how efficiently they perform it (Shahzadi et al., 2014). It is seen that studies on job performance in the literature have generally explored this concept in the context of motivation, leader attitude and behavior, task design, and other organizational research topics (Griffin, 1981).

Although the position of the employees in the network of relations they are in is at a level that satisfies them, it is not considered sufficient for a serious increase in performance. However, job performance and productivity are explained as a pathway to promotion, and salary increase for employees. In addition, it is stated that the level of performance depends on the group norm in the work environment and if the norm is made as desired by the management, the desired employee performance will be achieved (Brayfield and Crockett, 1955). Thus, managers want to create an environment where their subordinates are satisfied with their work and their workplace so that they can achieve an effective and optimal performance by showing their talents (Azar and Shafighi, 2013). Hameed and Waheed (2011), argue that employee development positively affects job performance, and job performance positively affects organizational effectiveness. Diamantidis and Chatzoglou (2019) also stated that the two factors that most affect job performance are the work environment and management support, while they also state that adaptability and internal motivation are among the determinants of job performance. Otherwise, Murali et al. (2017) revealed that time pressure and role ambiguity negatively affect employee performance based on the analysis of data gathered from 136 employees from various sectors.

2.2. Organizational Identification

Individuals who identify as members of the organization can absorb the organizational culture and corporate goals and align their objectives with the vision of the organization. OI brings employees to par with the organization both emotionally and cognitively (Riketta, 2005). The level of identification with the organization plays a vital role in making sense of the attitudes and behaviors of the employees towards work. Similarly, the level of identification of individuals with the organization has been shown to result in favorable outcomes for both the individual (self-esteem and self-worth) and the organization (established and committed human capital) (Carmeli et al., 2007). OI is thus considered a key variable in understanding the behavior and performance of members of an organization.

When individuals have reached a certain level of connection with the organization to which they belong and have adopted the fate of the organization as their own, a sense of belonging is born which then meets their safety needs and helps reduce uncertainty about their position at the workplace (Ashforth et al., 2008). According to Dutton et al. (1994), the linked fate pushes employees to exert more effort in their work knowing that their existence depends on that of the organization.

Another positive aspect of increased OI is the improved motivation and increased job satisfaction that comes with it (Van Dick, 2005). An employee with a high level of identification enjoys an increased level of physical and emotional well-being and is motivated to perform at the highest level.

2.3. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

Leadership literature often ties leader behavior or style to some form of reaction or action from the employee, and this is the case that has been perpetuated in LMX literature. The LMX theory presumes that the leader's time, energy, and authority are limited, and they wouldn't want to waste it on non-responsive employees. As such, the leader gets into an exchange relationship with employees depending on the reciprocity from the other side. The theory presents different levels of communication between the leader and the employees with the *in-group* feeling closer to the leader and feeling some degree of privilege based on the attention they receive from the leader (Dansereau et al., 1975). The perceived privilege often determines how the employees conduct themselves in the organization as well as their feelings about the organization. For instance, (Lee, 2005) presents the finding from 201 respondents from Singapore in which commitment to the organization is found to be somehow tied to the quality of LMX.

Employees have certain expectations as a result of their job description in terms of monetary compensation and fringe benefits. Employees that enjoy a higher quality interaction with their leaders will probably have higher expectations as a reward for the loyalty and trust they have in their leaders and the organization whereas the leader will expect the employees to take on more tasks. Howell and Hall-Merenda (1999) tie LMX to contingent rewards, an indication that leaders compensate employees in the *in-group* more handsomely. They also find high-quality LMX to be tied to job performance.

Many more studies in the extant literature have considered the impact of LMX on the performance of the employees and of the organization by looking at different factors of the organization. There is a general agreement on the existence of a relationship between high-quality LMX and the performance of the leader, member, workgroup, and organization (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995).

According to Janssen and Van Yperen (2004), high-quality interaction relationships focus on mutual trust, knowledge sharing, respect, and the responsibilities of leaders and followers to each other. Such an interaction instills in the employees, confidence to perform their tasks and opens them up to being more creative. The confidence derived from the knowledge that they have the trust of their superior and that the leader has their back makes them want to go a step further beyond the call of duty. Out of this interaction, the employees find within themselves the motivation to work harder leading to improved performance and increased job satisfaction.

Mutual interaction, more sincere and more honest communication is provided between the leader and the in-group, employees have more access to resources, and role behaviors beyond expectations are exhibited by the members. It is thought that high LMX increases efficiency and satisfaction (Gerstner and Day, 1997). Members in the outgroup are deprived of opportunities to develop their career and self-development. These members have limited communication with their leader, and they get less support, resources, and information from the leader. It is claimed that this situation will increase the job dissatisfaction of the member, decrease the organizational commitment and increase turnover intention (Maslyn and Uhl-Bien, 2001).

Scott and Bruce (1998) revealed that the higher the quality of LMX, the higher the innovative behavior level of the members. Atwater and Carmeli (2009) relate a good LMX to the positive state of energy experienced by employees and this provides a momentary force arising from the improved mood which thus creates positive emotions, intrinsic motivation, readiness to act, and participation. This provides followers with a cognitive and emotional power that will enable them to exhibit creative behaviors. Similarly, LMX energizes followers, accelerates their performance, and ultimately contributes to creative work. Creativity is often equated to performance, especially in sectors that depend on creativity for daily sustainability. It thus benefits the leader to be in a close interaction relationship with his relationship with creative employees, both for the business, the leader and the employee.

In their study that considers a total of 48 participants consisting of managers and employees of a consulting firm, Graen et al. (1982) found LMX to be more effective on personnel turnover rate than the average leadership style. A similar result was found by Krishnan, (2005) who also found LMX to influence the intention to job satisfaction and the employee's intention to leave.

Job performance both affects and is affected by LMX (Brower et al., 2000). Members who gain the leader's trust and support ass a result of high job performance may be considered a special group by the leader. However, it also can be thought that the members who want to reach the leader's support and the resources that the leader will distribute will want to position themselves in the close circle of the leader by showing higher job performance.

2.4. Hypothesis Development

LMX and OI have been used both separately and together to predict other organizational phenomena (Deconinck, 2011; Loi et al., 2014), and generally, both have often been found to positively impact the various outcomes of an organization such as turnover rate, job satisfaction, and performance. The two factors together are brought together by the feelings they arouse in the employees in the organization. By looking at the nature of LMX in a range, there will always be employees that enjoy a high-quality LMX and those that have a low-quality LMX, and others yet in the middle. The employees who are on the higher side of the spectrum may benefit from contingent rewards (Howell and Hall-Merenda, 1999), such as career and self-development (Maslyn and Uhl-Bien, 2001), and even the benefit of improved communication and relations. If the aforementioned benefits are attributed to the nature of the leader by the employees, they can increase their performance by associating their leaders with their organizations (Eisenberger et al., 2002). Employees can feel safer and readily willing to adopt the values of the organization when they already enjoy a closer relationship with their superiors hence tying LMX to OI. Accordingly, a study carried out by Erdogan and Enders (2007) found that benefits like recognition and promotion that could be gleaned from a high-quality LMX are possible to inspire reciprocal action by employees who may feel the need to increase their performance by dedicating themselves to their work and showing more commitment. The study confirms the relationship between LMX and job performance through a survey of a total of 248 employees and supervisors of a grocery store chain in the United States. Similarly, Wang (2016) also looked at the impact of LMX on motivation, creativity, and job performance by surveying over 300 employees and 60 supervisors in Taiwanese international Tourist hotels. The findings provided evidence of improved motivation and performance in instances of high-quality LMX.

Efraty and Wolfe (1988) surveyed 215 personnel at 8 nursing homes for the elderly on their extent of job satisfaction and performance among other issues. The findings revealed what has become a general trend in most of the literature - a positive relationship between OI and job satisfaction and performance. Carmeli et al. (2007) found out a positive link between OI and the degree of adjustment of employees in the organization which was then found to impact the rate of performance of the employees. Their study, which considered both subordinates and managers found the OI of employees to be a factor in the organizational financial and CSR performance, making OI a cause and a consequence of performance. Walumbwa et al. (2009) also reached that OI positive impact on performance in their study, which tested the research model on 398 employees from a large-scale automobile dealership. In addition, Kesen (2015) in his study researching the relationship between organizational democracy and job performance, found a mediate effect of OI on job performance. Finally, relating to our last hypothesis, Katrinli et al. (2008) found a positive relationship between LMX quality and OI.

In line with the aforementioned arguments, we proposed the hypotheses and the model shown below:

H1: The effect of leader-member exchange on performance is significant.

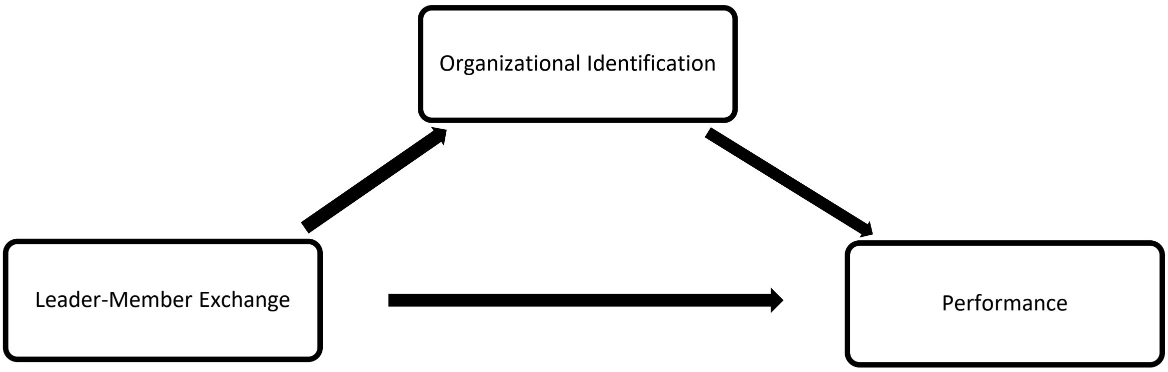
H2: The effect of leader-member exchange on organizational identification is significant.

H3: The effect of organizational identification on performance is significant.

H4: Organizational identification has a mediating role in the effect of leader-member exchange on performance.

In line with the studies in the literature, this study deals with whether OI has a mediating role in the effect of LMX on job performance and the type of this mediation. Our proposed research model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Proposed Research Model



3. METHOD

In this section, the sample of the study, data collection process, and measurement tools are discussed.

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

This research was carried out in a cross-sectional study. By convenience sampling technique, we selected the research assistants of Turkey public universities as the respondents for the study. The data were gathered from March 2020 to October 2020. A total of 201 questionnaires were received via google forms from research assistants of universities in Turkey. The sample size is appropriate for investigating the path model in the technique of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) which is a good choice when the sample size is relatively small and the data are non-normally distributed in the social sciences studies (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, we used SmartPLS 4 software based on PLS-SEM and SPSS 25 software for data analysis. PLS-SEM consists of a two-phase procedure: measurement model assessment, and structural model assessment. As a first phase, The measurement model assessment focuses on the reliability and validity of the construct measures. The structural model will be implemented if the measurement model description ensures that those constructs have acceptable indicator outer loadings, convergent validity, composite reliability, and discriminant validity. In a second phase, path coefficients are evaluated and their significance is investigated in structural model assessment (J. F. Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, we assessed the measurement model as the first phase followed by the structural model assessment as the second phase in the analysis process.

In addition, common method bias (CMB) is a potential problem that may influence behavioral studies carried out through the self-evaluation of the individual by using the questionnaire technique (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To helps to identify CMB, we used Harman's one-factor test, one of the most commonly used techniques by researchers, as suggested by Podsakoff et al., (2003). CMB is not likely to be a potential problem in the study, because the first factor (33.38%) was accounted for less than the recommended threshold of 50% of total variance shared by all items (with all measured items included) (Fuller et al., 2016; Kock et al., 2021). We used also the full collinearity test as an indication of the CMB proposed by Kock, (2017, p. 245). The variance inflation factors (VIFs) values obtained by SmartPLS for all latent variables of our model were examined. CMB is not present, because all VIFs (range between 1262 and 2688) arising from a full collinearity test are lower than 3.3 (Kock and Lynn, 2012).

3.2. Measures

For the questionnaire used in the study, previous studies in the literature were used. LMX Scale which consists of 7 items was developed by Graen and Scandura (1987) and adapted to Turkish culture by Özutku et al. (2008). The mediator variable for this study, OI is a scale by developed Mael and Ashforth (1992). The scale was adapted to the Turkish culture by Tak and Aydemir, (2004). We used the performance scale formed by Zehir and Erdogan (2011) by benefiting from the scales developed by Kirkman and Rosen, (1999), Fuentes et al. (2004), Rahman and Bullock, (2004), as the dependent variable for this study. The survey used a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "Strongly Agree."

4. RESULTS

According to descriptive statistics in Table 1, approximately 37% of the 201 respondents who completed the questionnaire were female, while 63% of them were male. Most respondents were in the 26-35 (42%) and 31-35 (38%) age range. The majority of the respondents (83%) had a doctoral education and almost 58% of them were not married.

Table 1: The Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Variables	Percentage (%)	
Gender	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Male	37.4	37.4
Female	62.6	100
Age		
21-25	10.8	10.8
26-30	42.4	53.2
31-35	37.4	90.6
36+	9.4	100
Education Level		
Master's Degree	17.2	17.2
PhD	82.8	100
Marital Status		
Married	41.9	41.9
Single	58.1	100

4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

We tested the reliability and the validity of the construct for the study model. First, all items were examined for factor loadings. When considering the measurement model, some items were extracted from the measurement model because the factor loadings were low the required threshold value of 0.60 (Gefen and Straub, 2005, p. 92). All of the constructs have average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values that are equal to or greater than 0.50 and 0.70, respectively. The Cronbach's Alpha (α) values ranged from 0.75 to 0.89, surpassing the threshold value (0.7) hence, convergent validity and reliability are confirmed (Ali et al., 2018). Additionally, an SRMR value of 0,074 was derived for the proposed research model, suggesting an above-average model fit. In general, an SRMR value of less than 0.08 is suggested to be acceptable for PLS path models (Hair et al., 2019; Merli et al., 2019). Table 2 shows indicators of outer loadings and results of CR and AVE for all the constructs.

Table 2: Measurement Model Assessment Results

Variables	Λ	α	rho_A	CR	AVE	Model Fit
Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)		**0.891**	**0.908**	**0.885**	**0.613**	
LMX2	0.602					
LMX3	0.949					
LMX4	0.918					
LMX6	0.712					**SRMR**=0.074
LMX7	0.675					
Organizational Identification (OID)		**0.807**	**0.855**	**0.816**	**0.606**	χ^2 = 381.39
OID3	0.831					NFI = 0.81
OID4	0.913					
OID5	0.644					
Performance (PERF)		**0.750**	**0.750**	**0.746**	**0.50**	
PERF1	0.649					
PERF2	0.689					
PERF3	0.768					

** Λ: Outer Factor Loadings; α: Cronbach Alpha; CR: Convergent Validity; AVE: Average variance extracted; Rho_A = Reliability Coefficient.

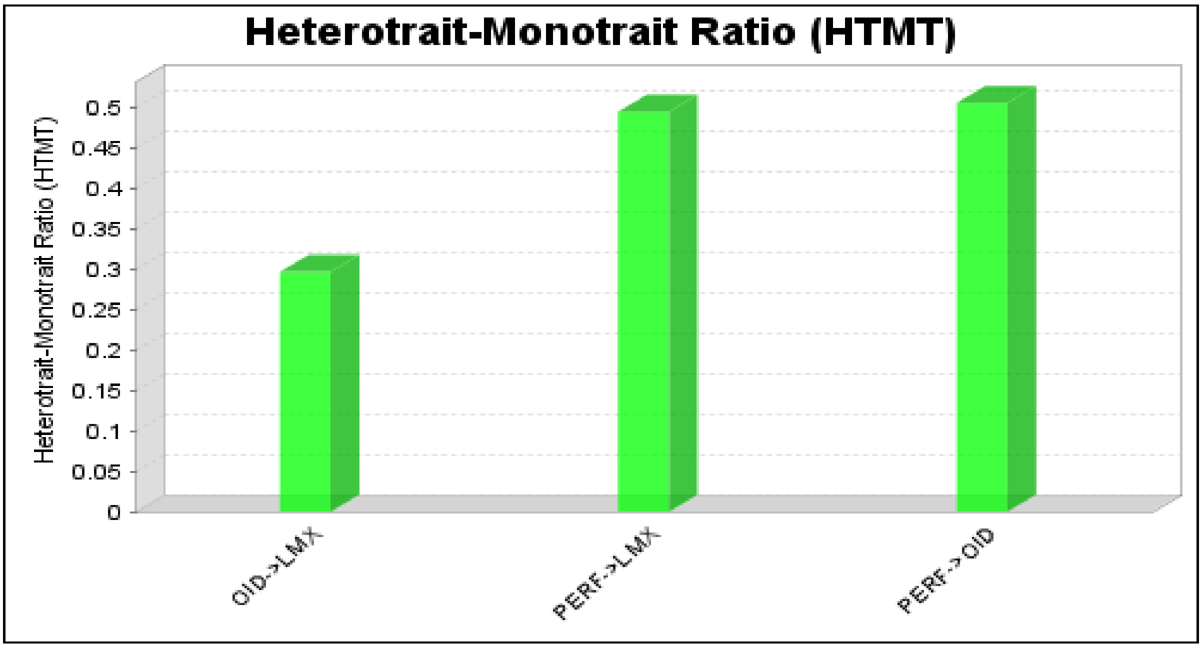
To evaluate the discriminant validity of the construct, we used the Fornell-Larcker's criterion and the Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio (See Table 3, and Figure 2). In the correlation matrix of the Fornell-Larcker's criterion (Table 3), the square root of the construct's AVE is indicated in bold on the diagonal, whereas the other values indicate correlations with other constructs. (Sahibzada et al., 2020). Accordingly, to ensure discriminant validity, the square root of each AVE (shown in bold on the diagonal) must be higher than the related inter-construct correlations (Ali et al., 2018; Henseler et al., 2015). The Heterotrait– Monotrait ratio (HTMT), which has a high sensitivity for validity issues in PLS-SEM, was also employed to test discriminant validity. All values (0.29; 0.49;0.50) of the HTMT are less than the suggested 0.90 values (Figure 2). In this respect, discriminant validity was achieved (Henseler et al., 2015; Merli et al., 2019). Overall, the measurement model evaluation demonstrated the reliability and validity of constructs. Therefore, the following section carried out the second phase of the analysis process.

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity

Constructs	LMX	OID	PERF
LMX	**0.783**		
OID	0.314	**0.779**	
PERF	0.507	0.504	**0.690**

Note. Square root (AVE) on the diagonal in boldface and construct correlations below the diagonal. LMX: Leader-Member Exchange; OID: Organizational Identification; PERF: Performance.

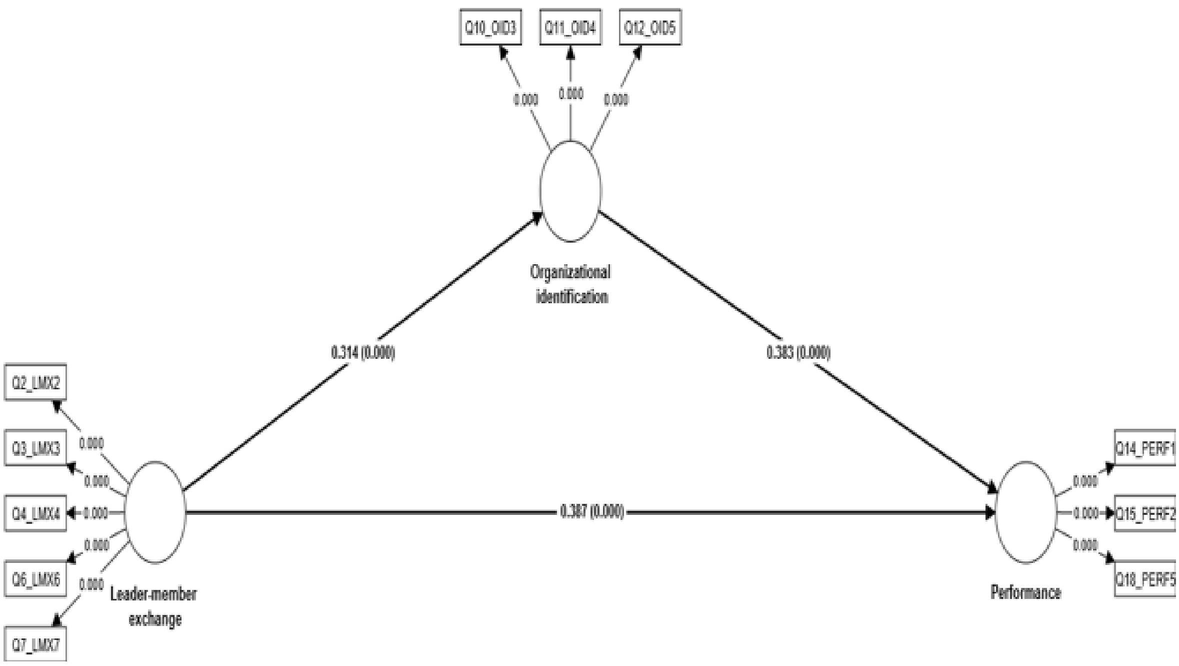
Figure 2: HTMT Discriminant Validity



4.2. Structural Model Assessment

SmartPLS software version 3.3.3 was used to test the hypotheses of the study. The statistical significance of the path coefficients in the structural model was investigated using the bootstrapping approach with 5.000 iterations. Figure 3 shows the visual appearance of the tested structural model.

Figure 3: Results of the Structural Model



For the model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) reflects the effect of the exogenous latent variables on endogenous latent variables and the criterion of predictive accuracy (Merli et al., 2019). In addition, to evaluate the values of the R^2 values as a criterion of predictive accuracy of the model, this study also calculated Stone-Geisser's Q^2 values, obtained via a blindfolding procedure (J. F. Hair et al., 2017; Merli et al., 2019). The predictive accuracy of the model is confirmed by the Q^2 and R^2 values since R^2 values of the OI and the performance can be described as moderate and the Q2 values are higher than zero (See Table 4).

Table 4: Endogenous Constructs Assessment

Construct	R^2	Q^2
OID	0.299	0.047
PERF	0.389	0.150

Note: Q^2 values greater than zero are meaningful; R2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered substantial, moderate, and weak (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2019); OID: Organizational identification; PERF: Performance

Next, H_4 evaluates whether OI mediates the linkage between LMX and performance. The results showed that the total effect of LMX on performance without the introduction of the mediator into the model was significant (H1: β = .507, t = 6.846, p < .005). While the direct effect with the inclusion of the mediating variable into the analysis, the impact of LMX on performance was observed to be significant and decreased by 0.38 from 0.507 (β = .387, t = 4.922, p < .000). The indirect effect of leader-member exchange on performance via OI was found significant since the confidence interval of the indirect effect does not also include zero (β = 0,120, t= 2.933, p < .003). The results, therefore, reveal a partial mediation. According to Zhao et al. (2010), since both the direct effect and indirect effect point in the same positive direction, the mediating role is a complementary partial mediation (Nitzl et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2010). This shows that the effect of LMX on performance is partially mediated by OI. Accordingly, the effect of the quality of the relationship between research assistants and their advisors on their performance is affected by their identification with the organizations. Results of the bootstrapping technique show that all path coefficients are significant with a confidence interval of 95%. Consequently, all the hypotheses (H_1, H_2, H_3, and H_4) are supported. The results of the mediation analysis are given in Table 5, and all hypothesis results are shown in Table 6.

Table 5: Summary of Mediation Results

Total Effect (LMX->PERF)		Direct Effect (LMX->PERF)		Indirect Effects of LMX on PERF (LMX->OID->PERF)				
Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	p-value	Coefficient	SD	T value	p-values	LLCI (2.5%); ULCI (97.5%)
6,846	0,000	4,922	0,000	2,933	0,041	2,933	0,003	.050; .212

Finally, we benefited from the Cohen's (1992) guidelines to measure the effect size. Cohen (1992, p. 100) states that 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 are considered small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively. In this respect, the effect sizes of H_1 (f^2= 0.221) and H_3 (f^2= 0.216) are medium and the effect size of H_2 is small as can be understood from Table 6.

Table 6: Results of Path Coefficients

Hypotheses	Relationship	β	Mean	SD	t-value	Decision	f^2
H_1	LMX -> PERF	0,387	0,389	0,079	4,922	Supported	0.221
H_2	LMX -> OID	0,314	0,321	0,083	3,763	Supported	0.109
H_3	OID -> PERF	0,383	0,383	0,081	4,708	Supported	0.216
H_4	LMX->OID->PERF	0,120	0,123	0,041	2,933	Supported	

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study investigates the effect of the quality of the relationship between research assistants and their advisors on their job performance and the mediating role of OI in this process. Research data includes 201 complete questionnaires gathered from research assistants work for public universities in Turkey. Accordingly, some conclusions drawn from the results are discussed below.

The results reveal that while the quality of the exchange of research assistants with their advisors affects their job performance, they also develop a sense of belonging to the universities they work for in the process. The increase in the attitude of research assistants to see themselves as a part of the organization they work for affects their performance positively. In other words, according to the results, as the quality of the relationship between the advisor and the research assistants increases, the positive feelings of the research assistant towards the organization and the level of sense of belonging increase. This also reflects more positively on the job performance of the research assistants. Therefore, it is seen that OI is a significant mediator variable in the tested model and is an effective factor in increasing the job performance of research assistants. Consequently, it is understood that more attention should be paid to the quality of the relationships of advisors and research assistants, who are the academic future of their universities to increase their identification with the organization and thus, increase their performance.

This study has some limitations. The partial mediation role of OI in the study may be a clue to the necessity of other mediating variables in the model. Thus, future studies can be carried out on mediation effects by adding different variables to the model. The second limitation of the study is the sample size. Although tests regarding the validity and reliability of the scales used in this study, which was conducted with 201 respondents, were carried out, larger sample sizes are always desirable. Another limitation is that the study only covers research assistants working at universities in Turkey. In future, researchers could investigate the proposed model by testing it comparatively with a sample that includes respondents from different countries.

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