

Leveraging the Leader-Member Exchange Theory in HIM

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Editor's note: This article is an excerpt from "Leader-Member Exchange Relationships in Health Information Management," published in the Spring 2014 issue of AHIMA's scholarly research journal Perspectives in Health Information Management.

Following the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory of leadership could potentially benefit the health information management (HIM) profession. However, a recent literature review of LMX research in multiple disciplines spanning 1975-2011 found that although there were significant findings on LMX benefits, no peer-reviewed studies addressed its use in the HIM profession. The review, as detailed in this article, ultimately identified a need for further scholarly work to build the HIM industry's body of knowledge on the use and benefits of LMX.

What is LMX?

The LMX theory emphasizes the leadership process of interaction between leaders and followers. It asserts that leaders have a unique relationship with each follower, rather than one leadership style or method that is applied to everyone. Leadership on a dyadic level refers to effective relationships between a leader and individual followers based on mutual trust, respect, and commitment. Therefore LMX theory is different from other theories of leadership that focus only on the leader's activities or on the situation and environment. Building individual personal relationships with high levels of mutual trust, respect, and commitment shared by both parties provides demonstrable benefits to both leaders and followers.

Exploring HIM Leadership

Just as there is no universal definition or approach to leadership, there has not been one common approach to leadership accepted and utilized by HIM practitioners, educators, and researchers. Few leadership theories have been published regarding the HIM profession specifically. The literature review conducted on LMX and HIM is not intended to recommend one leadership method or theory exclusively, but simply to bring attention to the need for leadership preparation as well as the need for further methods that strengthen leadership in the HIM profession.

As the field continues to evolve there is a need to prepare HIM professionals for increased leadership capabilities in order to meet future healthcare challenges.

Research States Benefits of LMX Relationships

The literature review and additional research indicates that leaders with high-quality LMX relationships with coworkers experience positive benefits such as lower turnover, higher job satisfaction, and more positive employee behaviors. Conversely, benefits for followers include an increase in career growth, higher organizational influence, and more complex roles.

Several factors—including organizational culture and practices, type of work, location, length of assignments, and the number of team members—can affect LMX. Others feel that LMX is related more to satisfaction with the leader than to the actual quality of the exchange relationship.

An instrument called the LMX-7, which was developed by researchers George B. Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien in order to measure leader-member exchange, can provide even deeper insight into relationships. The instrument employs seven questions that can be answered from a leader or follower perspective on a five-point Likert scale.

Questions such as "how would you characterize your working relationship with your leader/follower" and "what are the chances your leader/follower would use their power to help you solve work problems," are designed to gauge trust, respect,

and a sense of obligation between people. Therefore, communication is found to be a large part of high-quality LMX relationships.

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To help celebrate *Perspectives*' 10 years of scholarly publishing that has advanced the health information practice, *Journal of AHIMA* will be running additional excerpts throughout 2014—with the next appearing in the November/December 2014 issue of the magazine.

Leveraging LMX Tools in the Workplace

Factors that research has found are related to high-quality LMX relationships could be used by HIM professionals as tools to leverage in the workforce, whether in leading a team or working with direct supervisors. When preparing HIM professionals to succeed in the workplace, it may be important to focus not only on technical competency but also on building mutual trust, respect, commitment in interpersonal relationships, and leadership.

Focusing on LMX could be an asset for HIM professionals when leading an HIM department, a team of remote employees, a project implementation, or when seeking to influence the direction of one's healthcare organization.

Evidence in multiple cultures suggests that high-quality LMX relationships are beneficial for individual career advancement and success in any role. LMX may also benefit the professional workforce as a whole domestically and internationally. An awareness of the potential benefits of the LMX concept in HIM may support further inclusion of, or attention to, this theory in formal degree and continuing education offerings.

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Access the complete "Leader-Member Exchange Relationships in Health Information Management" article online for full details of how the LMX theory of leadership can be utilized in HIM. Read the complete Spring and Summer 2014 issues of *Perspectives* at <http://perspectives.ahima.org>, and learn more about submission guidelines for the scholarly research journal.

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