

On the Relationship Between Leader-Member Exchange and Employees' Turnover Intentions: Examination of Mediation Role of Trust in Leader

Lider-Üye Etkileşimi ile Çalışanların İşten Ayrılma Niyetleri Arasındaki İlişki Üzerine: Lidere Duyulan Güvenin Aracılık Rolünün İncelenmesi

Eser Erdurmazlı¹ , Gökdeniz Kalkın² 



ABSTRACT

As the most important determinant of turnover behaviors, an employee's intention to leave his/her job stands out as one of the strongest predictors of that employee's actual turnover behavior. Economic opportunities, personal and work-related factors can play an important role in employees' intention to leave. Moreover, it is suggested in the literature that dyadic relationships between employees and their managers (i.e. leaders) are one of the important factors affecting that turnover intention. Although there are studies focusing on the relationship between leader-member exchange and turnover intention in the current literature, there is a need to explain how this relationship between leader-member exchange and turnover intention emerges, together with the related theoretical mechanisms. Considering that trust is an important factor determining the quality of relationships between managers and employees, it is however quite surprising that among studies in the existing literature investigating the ways how the quality of leader-member interactions affects employees' turnover intentions, there is no study that examines trust in the leader as a mediating mechanism. In this context, the current study examines the mediating effect of trust in leader in order to draw a clear picture of the relationship between the quality of leader-member interaction and the employee's intention to leave. This study makes use of social exchange and leader-member exchange theories to draw a clearer picture of this relationship. In order to test the hypothesis of the research, the data collected from 217 participants working in various hotels operating in Muğla province and carrying out different tasks were analyzed. In the analysis of the data collected by the survey method, PROCESS macro for SPSS/SAS developed by Hayes and regression analyses were used, so that direct and indirect effects were calculated. The findings of the study confirm that trust in leader mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange quality and employee turnover intention. In addition to its theoretical contribution that can fill the gap in the relevant literature, it is thought that the findings of this study may also help to retain the qualified workforce in the hospitality sector in the practical context. **Keywords:** Leader-member exchange (LMX), turnover intention, trust in leader, hospitality sector, hotel businesses

¹Dr., Gendarmerie and Coast Guard Academy, Ankara, Türkiye

²Dr. Instructor Member, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Dalaman School of Civil Aviation, Muğla, Türkiye

ORCID: E.E. 0000-0001-7568-6092;
G.K. 0000-0001-9200-5893

Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:

Gökdeniz Kalkın,
Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Dalaman Sivil
Havacılık Yüksekokulu, Muğla-Türkiye
E-mail/E-posta:
gokdenizkalkin@mu.edu.tr

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ÖZ

İşten ayrılma davranışlarının en önemli belirleyicisi olarak bir çalışanın işten ayrılma niyeti, o çalışanın fiili işten ayrılma davranışının en güçlü yordayıcılarından biri olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Ekonomik imkanlar, kişisel ve işle ilgili faktörler çalışanların işten ayrılma niyetlerinde önemli rol oynayabilmektedir. Dahası, literatürde çalışanlar ve yöneticileri (yani liderler) arasındaki ikili ilişkilerin çalışanların işten ayrılma niyetini etkileyen önemli faktörlerden biri olduğu öne sürülmektedir. Mevcut literatürde lider ve astları arasındaki etkileşimler ile işten ayrılma niyeti arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanan çalışmalar bulunsa da, lider-üye etkileşimi ile işten ayrılma niyeti arasındaki bu ilişkinin nasıl ortaya çıktığının teorie dayalı ilgili mekanizmaları ile birlikte açıklanmasına ihtiyaç bulunmaktadır. Dahası, güvenin yönetici ve çalışan arasındaki ilişkilerin kalitesini belirleyen önemli bir faktör olduğu dikkate alındığında, mevcut literatürde lider-üye etkileşiminin kalitesinin çalışanların işten ayrılma niyetleri üzerinde hangi yollarla etkilerde bulunduğunu araştıran çalışmalar içerisinde lidere duyulan güveni aracı bir mekanizma olarak inceleyen herhangi bir çalışmanın bulunmayışı da oldukça şaşırtıcıdır. Bu kapsamda mevcut çalışma, lider-üye etkileşiminin kalitesi ile çalışanın işten ayrılma niyeti arasındaki ilişkinin nasıl ortaya çıktığının net bir resmini oluşturulabilmek üzere 'lidere duyulan güven'in aracılık etkisini incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, söz konusu ilişkinin daha net bir resmini çizebilmek için sosyal mübadele ve lider-üye etkileşimi teorilerinden faydalanmaktadır. Araştırmanın hipotezini test etmek amacıyla, Muğla ilinde faaliyet gösteren çeşitli otellerde çalışan ve farklı görevler yürüten 217 katılımcıdan toplanan veriler analiz edilmiştir. Anket yöntemiyle toplanan verilerin analizinde Hayes tarafından SPSS/SAS için geliştirilen PROCESS makro ve regresyon analizleri kullanılmış, böylece doğrudan ve dolaylı etkiler hesaplanmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları, lidere duyulan güvenin lider-üye etkileşimi kalitesi ve çalışanın işten ayrılma niyeti arasındaki ilişkiye aracılık ettiğini göstermiştir. Çalışmanın bulgularının, ilgili literatürdeki boşluğu doldurabilecek kuramsal katkısına ilave olarak, konaklama sektöründeki nitelikli iş gücünün muhafaza edilmesine de pratik bağlamda yardımcı olabileceği değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Lider-üye etkileşimi (LMX), işten ayrılma niyeti, lidere duyulan güven, konaklama sektörü, otel işletmeleri

Turnover intention, which reflects the desire of a person to voluntarily terminate his/her job in the short term (Mobley, 1977), has an important potential to lead to negative consequences for organizations. In this regard, organizations might face substantial financial and operational problems due to the loss of experienced and high-performing employees and cost of new employment (Amunkete & Rothmann, 2015; Leupold et al., 2013). Besides, a high turnover rate in standard or low-performing employees is also not desirable, as it can lead to demoralization and socialization problems in workplace settings (Mowday, 1984).

According to the attitude theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), intentions are the most important determinant of actual behaviors, and therefore, turnover intention emerges as the strongest predictor of an employee's actual turnover behavior (Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Economic opportunities, personal and work-related factors can play significant roles in the intentions of employees to leave their jobs (Muchinsky & Morrow, 1980). Furthermore, in the literature, it is suggested that one of the factors affecting the turnover intention is the relationships between employees and their managers (i.e. leaders). Indeed, existing studies in the literature reveal a negative correlation between Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), an approach that focuses on the quality of dyadic relationships between leader and followers, and employee turnover intention (e.g., Ansari et al., 2007; Elanain, 2014; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Huang et al., 2021; Jordan & Troth, 2011; Niu et al, 2022; Kim et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2021).

Although there are studies focusing on the relationship between LMX and turnover intention in the current literature, it is considered that there is an obvious need to show more explicitly how the relationship between LMX and turnover intention emerges, and in this context, to include theoretically driven mechanisms that have the potential to explain this relationship in relevant research models. Thus, to draw a clearer picture of this relationship in question, based on the theories of social exchange and LMX, this study proposes that the social interactions between leader and subordinates have the potential to create a leader-subordinate relationship based on trust, loyalty and mutual commitment over time (Blau, 1964; Cropanzana & Mitchell, 2005; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Therefore, this current study claims that *trust in leader* stands out as important mechanism to explain the relationship between LMX quality and employee turnover intention. However, it is quite surprising that this theoretically-driven mechanism has not been included in the research models of the studies conducted to date.

Therefore, the main objective of the study is to examine whether trust in leader has a mediating role on this relationship. In an academic sense, by filling important gaps in organizational behavior and leadership literatures, it contributes to LMX and turnover literatures. In practical terms, by showing 'how' the quality of the leader-follower relationships has an impact on employee turnover intentions, the results of this study can help prevent high-performing employees from leaving their jobs, and can make a significant contribution to establishing of a more positive work environment and relations for those employees.

LMX and Turnover Intention

LMX theory asserts that a leader's dyadic relationship with each of his/her followers is unique, and depending on the quality of this relationship, leaders distinguish between their followers as in-group and out-group, and they maintain the relationships with in-group followers in a relatively closer and more privileged exchange process (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Mueller & Lee, 2002; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Hence, LMX theory stands out as a leadership approach that focuses on the quality of leader-subordinate relationships and argues that when the quality of the relationships between followers and their leaders is high, its reflection on individual and organizational outcomes will be significantly positive (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980).

From this perspective, this study is based on the notion that a high-quality leader-follower relationship will also have significant effects on an employee's turnover intention, which is a main determinant of the actual turnover behavior (Ajzen, 2011). Turnover intention is a cognitive process and expresses an employee's desire, thought and planning to quit his/her job (Mobley, 1982). In this sense, it is an employee's intention to voluntarily leave his/her organization (Hellman, 1997). In this context, it is a rational expectation that quality dyadic relationships between leaders and followers will also affect this cognitive process that generates employees' intentions to leave. Indeed, current studies of limited number in the literature support the existence of strong and negative relationships between these two variables (e.g., Ansari et al., 2007; Elanain, 2014; Huang et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2016; Niu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2021).

This study uses social exchange theory (SET) to explain the proposed relationship between these two variables. According to SET, social exchanges between individuals involve a set of interactions that create mutual obligations, and these interactions lead to

interdependencies depending on the actions of the relevant parties (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Emerson, 1976). A high-quality leader-subordinate relationship can result from such intense interactions which lead to reduced risk and increased collaboration (Molm, 1994). Moreover, high quality LMX reduces the barriers between leader and subordinates, and helps them get closer. It is more difficult for an employee who is in such a work relationship with his/her leader, where ideas are shared clearly and precisely and uncertainty disappears, to intend to leave his/her job.

Trust in Leader and Turnover Intention

The concept of trust in leader, also used as supervisory trust in the literature, is related to the perceptions of an employee about whether individuals can trust their leader, and is important for leader effectiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Hogan et al., 1994; Kramer, 1999). Trust is defined as a willingness to be vulnerable towards another person whose actions are not under his/her control, based on the belief that this person is qualified, honest, and caring (Hosmer, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Furthermore, the concept of trust is rooted in past experiences, and these experiences lead to beliefs on positive attitudes and behaviors between two sides of any dyadic relationship (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011). The experience gained based on the results of these dyadic interactions between leader and followers is one of the main determinants of the trust in-between (Stashevsky & Koslowsky, 2006).

Employees' feelings of trust in their leader are important in terms of their job attitudes and behaviors because supervisors have the authority to make decisions that can significantly affect employees' work lives (e.g., promotions and pay increases; Rich, 1997). Employees do not trust their leaders when they feel that their supervisors do not look after the interests of their subordinates or exploit their vulnerabilities. In this context, an employee's lack of trust in his/her supervisor will cause him/her to feel distressed and strengthen his/her intention to leave the organization (Mulki et al., 2006). Conversely, when leaders create sufficient trust in the work environment, this causes employees to feel more safe and more loyal to their work and organization (Costigan et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2000; Mishra & Morrissey, 1990; Trinchero et al., 2014). In support of these arguments, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) showed in their meta-analytic study that there is a remarkable relationship between trust in the leader and turnover intention. Similarly, Purba and colleagues (2016) empirically revealed that employees' trust in their supervisors has a negative effect on their turnover intention.

Mediation Role of Trust in Leader

Dienesch and Liden (1986) suggest that LMX has three dimensions: perceived contribution, 'affect', and 'loyalty'. Contribution means the assessment of how much the quantity and quality of the contributions of a leader and his/her subordinate to the work relationship between them serve the goals of both parties. This dimension points to the work-related interaction process between leader and followers emphasized by SET. The affect and loyalty dimensions, which are the output of this interaction process (i.e., contribution), point to the emotional aspect of the leader-subordinate relationship and reflect the quality level of this relationship in question (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). In other words, unlike the 'contribution' dimension, which is more defined as a '*work-oriented*' mechanical interaction process, the affect and loyalty dimensions refer to an emotional interaction process. In this process, it becomes clear to what extent a subordinate influences his/her leader with his/her performance, and how special and privileged that leader treats this subordinate in return. So, this process eventually determines the quality of that leader-subordinate relationship (Brower et al., 2000; Liden & Maslyn, 1998).

In line with SET principles, the LMX approach argues that care, support and privileges given by a leader to any of his/her followers based on the assessment of the contribution of that follower will lead to similar feelings on the follower side. Also, the developing affect and loyalty sentiments in followers will make them feel more secure and have much more positive thoughts and feelings about their leader (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Moreover, this situation will lead to formation of mutual feelings of trust between leader and followers, and make them more committed to each other (Blau, 1964; Bukhari & Bhutto, 2021; Cropanzana & Mitchell, 2005). Indeed, Molm (2000; 2003) emphasized in her studies that such successful exchange processes between leader and followers can be characterized by mutual trust. So, this study asserts that 'trust' is a key concept to explain the relationships between leader behaviors and employees' job attitudes and behaviors.

Although trust is an important component of the LMX concept, as it has just been emphasized above, it is difficult to say that it is sufficiently emphasized in the current literature along with LMX and job attitudes such as employee turnover intention. In one of these limited studies, for example, Naveed (2019) examined the relationships between LMX and employee outcomes (i.e. job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention) and whether trust moderates these relationships and confirmed the

aforementioned moderation effects of trust. Another study examining the relationships between interpersonal justice, LMX, job burnout, and turnover intention showed that employees' cognition-based trust in their leaders moderated the relationship between LMX and job burnout (Son et al., 2014). In a study on basketball players, Mach and Lvina (2016) found that trust in a leader (i.e. coach) positively affects team trust and team performance. Mushonga (2018) explored in his study the moderating effects of affective trust on the relationships between LMX and task performance, turnover intention, loyalty to supervisor, and organizational citizenship behavior, and ultimately revealed that the relationships between LMX and work outcomes are stronger when followers have high affective trust in their leaders. In a recent meta-analytical study, the affective and cognitive trust between leaders and employees was examined and it was shown that trust has an impact on employees' organizational citizenship behaviors and organizational commitments (Fischer et al., 2020). In another recent study conducted in the logistics industry in Türkiye, Altuntaş and colleagues (2020) found that trust in leader does not have a direct effect on turnover intention, that LMX influences turnover intention negatively, and that LMX acts as a mediator in the relationship between trust in leader and employee turnover intention.

As can be easily noticed above, in the existing literature examining trust in leader along with LMX and various job attitudes or work outcomes, trust in leader has been predominantly included as a moderator variable into the pertinent research models. In this respect, this study differs from the existing literature. Relatedly, this study argues that trust in leader should be examined as a mediating variable rather than a moderating factor. Such that, trust includes an exchange process such as LMX, and this process defines a relationship in which leader and subordinates cyclically interact and mutually contribute (Butler, 1991; Ferrin et al., 2008). Therefore, trust is one of the important components of LMX theory (Deluga, 1994; Schriesheim et al., 1999). Indeed, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) argue in their meta-analytic study that a significant part of the existing studies in the literature has examined trust in leader in accordance with the social exchange process. Furthermore, the result of leader-follower interactions in this social exchange process is the determinant of the trust between leader and followers (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Supporting these arguments, existing studies in the literature suggest that high-quality LMX relationships between leaders and followers can be characterized by mutual trust and loyalty between relevant parties (e.g., Brower et al., 2000; Dienesch

and Liden, 1986; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Kramer, 1999). Consequently, this study argues that high level trust of employees in their leaders, as a key component of a high quality LMX, might substantially guarantee that they remain in their job and organization. In line with this idea, this present research maintains that quality leader-follower relationships lead employees to trust their leaders, which in turn causes employees to be more focused and loyal to their organization (Costigan et al., 2011). Consequently, the hypothesis of the study stresses the mediating role of trust in leader in the LMX-turnover intention relationship.

H1: Trust in leader mediates the relationship between LMX and employee turnover intention in such a way that a high level of LMX leads an employee to trust in his/her leader more and subsequently decreases his/her turnover intention.

Method

Participants

Turnover rate is important for keeping the service quality of hotel businesses at a high level and ensuring its continuity. Studies show that, just as in different parts of the world (i.e., Backes-Gellner et al., 1997; He et al., 2021; Simons & Hinkin, 2001), turnover continues to be a significant problem for the hospitality sector in Turkey (Tuna, 2007). Indeed, in a study conducted on coastal hotels in and around Muğla, employee turnover rate was measured to be high at the level of approximately 50% (Tütüncü & Demir, 2002).

Therefore, this study was carried out in Muğla, one of the important touristic cities of Turkey. A total of 277 prospective participants working in different hotels and determined by the convenience sampling method were invited for the study, and 217 employees accepted this invitation (participation rate 78%). There is no significant difference between the proportions of male and female participants in the sample (51% and 49%, respectively), and their average age is approximately 33. Participants were employed in different functional areas, including management 20%, administrative 4% (i.e., HR, accounting, etc.), food and beverage service 33%, technical 5%, housekeeping 18%, kitchen and food production 11%, security 7%, and health 2%. According to their education level, 3% of the participants had primary education, 42% had high school, 15% had associate degree, and 40% had bachelor's degree. The average length of work relationship that employees have with their direct supervisors is about 2.8 years.

Measures

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

This present study was based on the 7-item scale of Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995). This LMX-7 original scale measures employees' individual perceptions of the quality of their relationships with their immediate supervisors/managers. The present study benefited from the work of Çalışkan (2015), which was translated into Turkish, and it was seen that the Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .84$) and construct reliability (CR = 85) values of this scale were quite good. The reliability coefficient (i.e., Cronbach's α) calculated in the current study for this scale, in which the answers were arranged according to a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree), was .97.

Turnover Intention

The current research made use of the study of Örucü and Özafşarlıođlu (2013) to measure the turnover intentions of the research participants. This scale is originally based on the 3-item turnover intention scale developed by Mobley and colleagues (1978). The Turkish version of the scale used by Örucü and Özafşarlıođlu (2013), which was also used in some other studies conducted in Türkiye (e.g., Düger, 2020; Kendir et al., 2018; Öztürk & Eysel, 2021), was administered to Turkish employees ($N = 48$) in a textile business in South Africa. In that study, the scale had a high value of Cronbach's α (.90). The Cronbach's α value of the 5-point Likert-type (1= strongly disagree, 5= totally agree) scale was calculated as .96 in this study.

Trust in Leader

In this current study, employees' perceptions of trust in their leaders were evaluated with Rich's (1997) trust scale. This author examined in his study the relationships between sales managers' role modeling behaviors and trust that sales personnel feel for their managers, and calculated that the values of Cronbach's internal consistency reliability index ($\alpha = .96$) and the construct reliability index of the original scale were very high (CR = .96). In the study conducted by Yılmaz (2019), this scale was used by being translated into Turkish, and it was seen that the reliability of the scale was also considerably high ($\alpha = .87$). This 5-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= totally agree) includes 7 items about trust in the leader. In this study, the reliability coefficient of this scale was calculated as .93.

Control Variables

Since it was suggested that individual characteristics such as education, age and gender, and length of work relationship between leader and follower might be effective on turnover intention, these variables were included in the analyses as control variables (Carsten & Spector, 1987; Cotton & Tuttle, 1986).

Procedure

Questionnaires were administered to the research participants face-to-face and on site, and for this purpose, necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant hotel management before the process. The study was approved by the Ethical Board (No: 311, Date: 07 August 2021) of Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. It was stated clearly and several times to the participants that the participation in the survey would be completely voluntary, the answers would be kept strictly confidential and the identities of the participants would not be noted (i.e., anonymous). In this way, efforts were made to keep the number of participants as high as possible.

Data Analysis

To examine the direct impacts of LMX and trust in leader on employee turnover intention and the mediation effect of trust in leader (the research hypothesis), PROCESS macro for SPSS/SAS developed by Hayes (2013) is used. This macro calculates both the regression coefficients for the direct effects and the bias-corrected confidence intervals around the product coefficient for the indirect effect through a bootstrapping algorithm. Bootstrapping, which is a nonparametric approach, is independent of the shape of the distribution and gives relatively more accurate results than the coefficients obtained from the standard regression method (Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

Results

Construct Distinctiveness

The psychometric properties of the scales were evaluated to examine the distinctiveness of the constructs used in the study. For this purpose, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed for two separate measurement models, using the scale items for each variable. The first model was the expected model of the study with three factors (i.e., LMX, trust in leader, and turnover intention). In the two-factor alternative model, LMX and trust in leader were combined into a single factor, and turnover intention was freely estimated.

The CFA results revealed that the research model with three constructs fitted the data well ($\chi^2(116) = 238.77, p < .01, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .97, NFI = .95$). These fit values offered a significant improvement over the alternative model ($\chi^2(118) = 281.12, p < .01, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .96, NFI = .94, \text{ and } D\chi^2 = 42.35, p < .01$). Thus, these results provided the expected evidence for construct distinctiveness.

To confirm the CFA results, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each latent construct was calculated, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981). When the square root value of each AVE (\sqrt{AVE}) for each of the scales of LMX, trust in leader and turnover intention (i.e., .77, .71, and .75, respectively) was compared with the correlation coefficients between the variables presented in Table 1, it was seen that the necessary conditions were met. In addition, composite reliabilities (CR) of each scale were calculated, and it was seen that these were quite high values (i.e., .91, .88, and .80 respectively). Therefore, construct distinctiveness of LMX, trust in leader, and turnover intention were confirmed.

Descriptive Statistics

When the correlation values were examined, it was observed that the research variables (i.e., LMX, trust in leader and turnover intention) ranged between -.35 and .74, and all the relationships were statistically significant. Furthermore, it was seen that gender and length of work relationship out of the demographic variables had significant relationships with LMX and trust in leader (i.e. -.17 and -.19 for gender, and .19 and .17 for length of work relationship). Hence, these demographic variables were also included into the analyses as control variables while testing the research hypothesis. Descriptive statistics on the variables, Pearson correlations, Cronbach α 's of the scales,

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>CR</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age (years)	33.27	8.98			-	.02	-.55**	-.32**	.09	.03	.03	-.06
2. Gender (female:1, male:2)	1.49	.50				-	-.03	.10	.07	-.17*	-.19*	-.01
3. Marital status (married:1, single:2)	1.59	.49					-	.12	.11	-.05	-.03	.03
4. Education	3.96	1.07						-	.13	.05	.07	.05
5. Length of work relationship (years)	2.81	1.68							-	.19*	.17*	.12
6. Leader-member exchange	3.65	.94	.59	.91						(.97)	.74**	-.33**
7. Trust in leader	3.62	.90	.51	.88							(.96)	-.35**
8. Turnover intention	2.46	1.01	.57	.80								(.93)

N = 217; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; Reliability coefficients are on the diagonal (for 6, 7, and 8).

Hypothesis Test

Before testing the main hypothesis of the study, it might be useful to take a look at the direct effects of the independent (i.e. LMX) and the mediating (i.e. trust in leader) variables on the dependent variable (i.e. employee turnover intention), both separately and together. Moreover, taking into consideration that the variables of the research have not been studied to an adequate degree in the current literature, it can be considered that there is a need for this examination. Therefore, the direct effects mentioned, including the impacts of the control variables, are presented in Table 2.

Regarding the direct effect of LMX on employee turnover intention, the regression results showed that there is a significant and negative relationship between LMX and turnover intention ($\beta = -.37, p < .01, R^2 = .12$). Therefore, this result seems to support the existing literature. As for the direct effect of trust in leader on employee turnover intention, after including LMX together with the control variables into the analysis, the test results revealed that there is a significant and negative relationship between the two variables ($\beta = -0.34, p < .01, R^2 = .13$). In addition, the fact that the effect of LMX lost its significance at this stage and its effect size became quite small shows that trust in the leader mediates almost all the effects of the dependent variable on the independent variable.

Table 2
Direct Effects of LMX and Trust in Leader

	Employee Turnover Intention			
	β^*	SE	LLCI**	ULCI**
Age (years)	-.01	.01	-.02	.01
Gender	-.13	.13	-.40	.13
Marital status	-.05	.16	-.36	.26
Education	.05	.06	-.08	.17
Length of work relationship	.11	.15	-.05	.18
LMX	-.37	.07	-.51	-.23
$R^2 = .12, F = 6.56, p = .000$				
Age (years)	-.03	.01	-.04	.02
Gender	-.15	.13	-.42	.11
Marital status	-.05	.16	-.35	.27
Education	.05	.06	-.07	.18
Length of work relationship	.07	.10	-.10	.06
LMX	-.07	.16	-.39	.25
Trust in leader	-.34	.17	-.78	-.11
$R^2 = .13, F = 5.36, p = .000$				

$N = 217$; * β : Regression coefficient; **95% Bias-corrected Confidence Intervals (LLCI: Lower-level confidence interval; ULCI: Upper-level confidence interval).

The main hypothesis of the research predicted that trust in leader would mediate the relationship between LMX and turnover intention. For this purpose, the bootstrap results in the output of PROCESS macro were taken into account (See Table 3). The results showed that the confidence interval for the indirect effect of LMX on employee turnover intention via trust in leader as the mediating variable ($PE = -.29$, 95%CI [-.60, -.05]) did not contain the value of zero, indicating that the result was significant. Moreover, the results revealed that the direct effect of LMX was insignificant because the confidence interval ($PE = -.07$, 95%CI [-.39, .24] comprised zero. This indirect effect accounted for nearly 81% of the total effect of $-.36$ (see Table 3; $-.07 + -.29 = -.36$). It should also be emphasized that these findings are consistent with the regression analysis result just mentioned above. Consequently, the research hypothesis was supported.

Table 3

Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of LMX on Turnover Intention

Model	PE*	SE	t	p	LLCI**	ULCI**
Total Effect of LMX	-.37	.07	-5.15	.00	-.51	-.23
Direct Effect of LMX	-.07	.16	-.45	.65	-.39	.24
Indirect Effect of LMX						
	PE*	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI		
Trust in Leader	-.29	.17	-.60	-.05		

N = 217; *Point Estimate: 5000 iterations with replacement; **95% Bias-corrected Confidence Intervals (LLCI: Lower-level confidence interval; ULCI: Upper-level confidence interval).

Discussion

This study has focused on the relationship between LMX quality and turnover intention, which has been very limitedly addressed in the existing literature. Specifically, it has examined the existence of the mediating role of trust in leader in order to draw a clearer picture of how this relationship emerges. The findings have confirmed the existence of the hypothesized mediating role of trust in leader on that relationship. In this context, it is considered that the theoretical and practical implications of the findings deserve further discussion along with the limitations of the research and the suggestions for future studies.

Although there are various reasons behind employees' actual turnover behaviors, the turnover intention is ultimately seen as the most obvious determinant of this behavior (Griffeth et al., 2000; Parasuraman, 1982; Steel & Ovalle, 1984). Thus, identifying the factors affecting the development of those intentions of employees to quit their jobs and

manipulating these factors in a planned and systematic way in line with goals and interests of organizations can be an important theoretical contribution.

Although existing literature informs us about individual, organizational, economic, social and many other factors that affect turnover intentions of employees (Parasuraman, 1982), this current research argues that studies examining the effects of leader behaviors (i.e., immediate supervisors/managers) on employees' turnover intentions are still at its early stage. In this context, it is considered this current study can be a notable contribution to LMX and turnover literatures demonstrating the negative impact of LMX on employee turnover intention and how this effect occurs (i.e., through trust in leader). In this sense, the present study suggests that the quality of employees' dyadic relationships with their immediate supervisors must be considered as a critical factor affecting employee turnover intentions.

This study is, to our knowledge, the first to examine trust in leader as a mediating mechanism between LMX and turnover intention, and in this regard, it might fill an important gap within LMX and turnover theories. More specifically, while existing literature, albeit in limited numbers, confirms the relationship between LMX and employee turnover intention, the arguments used to explain this relationship focus more on the quality of the leader-follower relationships in general (e.g., Dienesch and Liden, 1986; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Harris & Kacmar, 2005). However, it is thought that it is not enough to explain the existence of this association only with the quality of LMX. Furthermore, a more satisfactory explanation is needed for 'how' the quality of LMX affects turnover intention. Thus, this present paper brings the concept of trust in leader, which reflects the essence of LMX theory, to the attention of LMX and turnover literatures as a mediating mechanism that can theoretically and reasonably explain this relationship. The concept of trust in leader, which is a function of the social exchange processes between leaders and followers, is the most important determinant of the quality of dyadic leader-follower relationships (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). Therefore, this study considers it a noteworthy theoretical contribution to hypothesize the mediating effect of trust in leader and to support this hypothesis with the empirical findings of this current research.

Regarding its practical implications, the results of this study show to managers at all levels of any organization that the quality of leader-subordinate relationships can be

quite effective in reducing turnover intentions of high-performing employees, which is an important problem for today's organizations. More importantly, it shows that for the effect expected from the quality of the leader-subordinate relationship, leaders must create a sense of trust in their subordinates towards themselves. Managers should keep in mind that they can build this sense of supervisory trust (i.e., trust in leader) in their work-related interactions (i.e., social exchange processes).

Furthermore, LMX theory emphasizes that there is an 'affect' dimension in addition to the mechanical side of the work-relationship between leader and followers, and suggests that this can manifest itself as a trust in leader. Indeed, the results of this present research provide empirical evidence for the validity and accuracy of these theoretical arguments to managers in the practical field. Hence, organizational managers should build quality dyadic relationships with each of their employees, so that employees can trust in those managers and avoid the intention to leave their jobs and organizations.

The findings of the study are a bit more remarkable in the case of the hospitality sector. Although the turnover intention scores of the participants in the sample seem to be at an average level (i.e., 2.46 out of 5), the high standard deviation of this value (i.e., $SD = 1.01$) shows that the variation in the turnover intentions among the participants is quite high, and therefore, this average score may not reflect the industry as a whole. Therefore, this research considers that the hospitality sector has a sensitivity in terms of employee turnover intentions.

Additionally, the high connection between LMX and turnover intention indicate that the turnover intentions of hotel employees are highly susceptible to quality of leader-follower relationships. In this context, managers should pay great attention to their relationships with hotel employees in order to keep service quality at a high level and to avoid negative consequences in terms of guest satisfaction. This result is, therefore, important for a hotel business to maintain its competitive advantage in the sector.

In this context, the current study recommends hotel managers that they should protect the interests of their employees and care about and value their well-being. Leaders should make their subordinates feel this way not only with their rhetoric, but also with their honest and sincere behaviors towards them. Furthermore, managers should support their employees in their jobs and increase their contribution to the work relationships with those employees as much as possible by providing them with the necessary resour-

ces and motivation they will need. If the managers treat their subordinates in this way, the quality of their relations with their subordinates will increase, the employees will feel safer in the work environment and they will feel more trust towards their managers. This feeling of trust, in turn, will help reduce turnover intentions of hotel employees, as this study suggested and confirmed.

As for the limitations of this study, first of all, it should be noted that this is a cross-sectional study, which could lead to the problem of common method bias. Such research designs are an obstacle to establishing cause-effect relationships between research variables because they involve uncertainty about the directions of relationships among research variables (Dust et al., 2014). For example, employees' trust in their leaders may be related to organizational norms, values, policies, and rules, or subordinates may feel that they can trust their leader from the attitudes and behaviors of the leader on several occasions, which in return may serve as an incentive for subordinates to develop more positive and constructive relationships with their leaders. That is, subordinates' sense of trust in their leaders may depend on some other factors rather than social exchange processes that this study underlines, and because of these factors, subordinates may contribute to the quality of dyadic relationships with their leaders. Therefore, caution should be exercised when making causal inferences between variables based on the results of this study. To overcome this kind of common method bias problem, it is recommended for future studies to employ longitudinal research designs (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Accordingly, leaving time intervals during the data collection process is also suggested.

Another limitation of the study, which also may lead to common method bias, is the collection of data from a single source (i.e., only the subordinates themselves). Although the positive results of confirmatory factor and AVE analyses for the distinctiveness of the scales reduce the suspicion of common method bias, one cannot say that this problem has been completely eliminated. Moreover, the findings of the present study are based on perceptual data. Objective measurements from other sources, which can replace these individual perceptual (i.e., subjective) assessments or be used in conjunction with them, are not included in this study. Therefore, in order to minimize the common method bias arising from subjective perceptions of a single source (i.e., employees) as much as possible, this research recommends future studies to consider also the assessments of leaders when evaluating the qualities of dyadic leader-follower relations-

hips. Also, if possible, they should benefit from research designs in which leader behaviors can be observed and noted in a systematic and planned way for more objective and consistent evaluations.

The dependent variable of this study is employee turnover intention. Looking at the test results, LMX and trust in leader together explain about 13% of the variance on this dependent variable (see Table 2). This result means that although leader behaviors have a significant effect on turnover intention, other factors also have a great impact on these intentions of employees. If the aim is to minimize employee turnover intentions as much as possible and to preserve efficient human resources within the organization, the recommendation for future studies might be to examine these other potential factors as well. A more specific suggestion in connection with this present study is that LMX might moderate the effects of these other possible factors, and therefore, it could also be considered in future research designs.

Similarly, it is thought that it would also be beneficial to include some organizational-level variables (i.e., organizational culture, organizational climate and organizational structure), which have the potential to affect the cause-effect relationships between the research variables, in future research models. In addition, this research considers it important for future studies to take into account different sectors other than the hospitality sector, in order to generalize the findings of the present research.

Furthermore, the participants who constitute the sample of this research reflect the general cultural characteristics of Turkish people. In this context, the scores of the participants regarding the research variables may have been affected by these cultural characteristics. Indeed, Rockstuhl and colleagues (2012) revealed that national culture affects the associations between LMX and its antecedents and outcomes. Therefore, studies to be employed in other national cultural settings may allow for more reliable and valid inferences in general.

In addition, although demographic variables were included into the analyses as control variables, other factors such as experience, personal traits, labor market conditions, industrial and general economic conditions that may have positive or negative effects on employees' turnover intentions can also be used as control variables in future studies. This is actually a need so that a more accurate and reliable picture of the relationships between variables can be drawn.

In conclusion, as its main objective, this study examined and confirmed that trust in leader plays a mediating role in the LMX and employees' turnover intentions. While this study fills a significant gap in the existing research on organizational behavior and leadership, it also shows organizational managers at all levels how the quality of the leader-follower relationships can impact employees' turnover intentions. In this regard, the results of this study can help organizations, regardless of sector, to keep high-performing employees within the organization, and help managers establish a more positive and safe work environment for their subordinates.

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