**Addressing Leader-Member Exchange and Self-Regulation as Remedies for Work Alienation: Insights from Private and Public Sectors in Turkey**

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**Abstract**

Although there is a growing body of literature on the consequences of work alienation, its antecedents have not received the same attention. Therefore, there is a need to examine elements affecting work alienation, the examination of which has been a preoccupation amongst both organisations and scholars. Drawing on the Social Exchange Theory and Self-Determination Theory, we aim to investigate the relationship between leader-member exchange, work alienation, and the mediation role of self-regulation on this relationship. We also consider whether tenure moderates the relationship between leader-member exchange and work alienation. To achieve the aim of the study, the quantitative research method is adopted by collecting data from 310 public and private sector employees and middle managers in Turkey. The partial least squares approach is employed to test the conceptual model, and multi-group analysis is used to examine whether the relationship differs with sector. The results reveal that leader-member exchange negatively affects work alienation, and self-regulation mediates this relationship. Tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between leader-member exchange and self-regulation. Multi-group analysis results demonstrate a higher impact of leader-member exchange on self-regulation in the public sector than in the private sector. Implications, limitations, and future studies are drawn from the results.

**Keywords**: Leader-Member Exchange, Work Alienation, Self-Regulation, Turkey, PLS

**Jel Classification**: M12, D23, C31

# **Introduction**

In an ideal workplace, employees are expected to work happily and contribute to the workplace; however, this does not often occur due to various detrimental organisational and individual issues (Cicek/Turkmenoglu/Ozbilgin 2021). Studies report that one such issue is work alienation (Shantz/Alfes/Bailey/Soane 2015). Work alienation (WA) has been identified as an injurious phenomenon in the workplace which takes place when employees feel that their workplace is detrimental to their labour, self, and work context (Hirschfeld/Field 2000). Recent studies suggest that employees' WA reduces their job performance (Kartal 2018), deteriorates organisational health (Özer/Uğurluoğlu/Saygılı/Sonğur 2019), and decreases employees' organisational commitment (Tummers/Den Dulk 2013). Thus, work alienation has been a preoccupation not merely to employers but also organisation members. Studies suggest that leadership style plays a role in the level of WA; in other words, while demonstrating transformational leadership is linked with lower WA, transactional leadership is associated with a higher level of WA (Sarros/Tanewski/Winter/Santora/Densten 2002). Prior research that has examined the reasons for WA also suggest that meaninglessness at work and poor-quality relationships cause WA (Nair/Vohra 2010). Based on this, interactions between leaders and members are worth examining further with regard to WA.

Speaking of interactions, Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau 1964) provides a lens through which to explain human behaviours in their exchanges, and from which leader-member exchange (LMX) has emerged. LMX is based on the idea that different relationships can develop between different organisation members and their leaders (Graen/Scandura 1987). According to LMX, leaders do not interact with all members equally; thus, behaviours of organisation members develop differently depending on their interactions with their leaders (Graen/Uhl-Bien 1995). According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964), which is based on the expected benefits when engaging in a relationship, low/high-quality relationships between leaders and members have impacts on work outcomes. Recent studies suggest that when organisation members have higher quality relationships with their leaders, they tend to demonstrate positive behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour and work engagement (Dulebohn/Bommer/Liden/Brouer/Ferris 2012). Although a number of studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of LMX (Martin/Guillaume/Thomas/Lee/Epitropaki 2016), it seems that there has been a very limited number of studies that directly show the association between LMX and WA (Can 2019). Therefore, we presume that while a high-quality LMX relationship would decrease WA, a low-quality LMX relationship would increase it.

Despite the expanding empirical evidence on the outcomes of WA, it is intriguing that its determinants have not gained similar attention. Since all employees and organisations suffer from WA to some extent, it is vital to determine the factors affecting WA. Investigating such evidence would be constitute a useful examination not merely for scholars and but also for organisations. Hence, we believe that the quality of a relationship with a leader, namely LMX, would play a role in diminishing WA. Moreover, little is known about possible mechanisms that might mediate the relationship between LMX and WA. Hence, this association needs further examination.

Moreover, demographic variables and their relationships with work behaviour constructs have received greater attention in management studies (English/Morrison/Chalon 2010). Tenure has been an influential variable in examining job satisfaction and job performance of employees (Pignata/Winefield/Provis/Boyd 2016) as well as counterproductive work behaviours such as cynicism (Ng/Feldman 2010) and knowledge hiding (Sarti 2018). To this end, we will consider whether tenure plays an influential role in our research model.

The purpose of this paper is to propose a research model involving a comparison of the public and private sectors in which we examine whether self-regulation of organisation members mediates the impact of LMX on work alienation. Five main goals are needed to achieve this purpose: first, we examine the impact of LMX on WA and SR; second, we investigate the influence of SR on WA; third, we extend SR research by examining it as a mediator for the relationship between LMX and WA; fourth, we investigate tenure as a moderator mechanism on the relationship between LMX and WA; and finally, we perform a multi-group analysis to compare the results that emerged from the two different sectors.

Data collected from 310 public and private sector organisation members in Turkey were used to investigate the linkages above via partial least squares (PLS) analysis. By doing so, our research contributes to the current knowledge by addressing the following gaps in the extant literature. First, there are studies that have investigated the relationship between leadership styles and WA (Sarros et al. 2002). These prior studies suggest that charismatic, participative, and supportive leadership behaviours hinder organisation members' work alienation (Banai/Reisel/Probst 2004). However, only very limited studies suggest that poor relationships in the workplace would increase WA of organisation members (Nair/Vohra 2010). Hence, we assume that LMX as a relationship-based construct that affects the WA of organisation members. Second, more importantly, no empirical studies to date have examined the effects of self-regulation on the relationship between LMX and WA. We presume that even though organisation members have lower interactions with their leaders, they can control their behaviours to avoid any alienation from their work. Third, research conducted in Turkey have examined the influences of WA on a number of work-related indications, e.g., job performance (Kartal 2018), organisational health (Özer et al. 2019). and work centrality (Tan 2016). Similarly, LMX has been investigated according to work outcomes, e.g., job satisfaction (Pellegrini/Scandura 2006) and turnover intention (Can 2019), yet there is a dearth of empirical investigations that have examined the impact of LMX on WA both in Turkey and elsewhere. Finally, previous studies have found that tenure and sector differences have various impacts on employee behaviours. Thus, utilising Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci/Ryan 1985), we contribute to the literature by not only deepening our understanding of WA (with an emphasis on supportive leadership behaviours) but also examine the effects of organisation members' LMX on WA. In terms of the practical implications of our research, we provide suggestions that may be useful for employees as well as managers. Our research underlines that work alienation may exist in organisations, and the availability of quality relationships with one’s leader may negate it. Even though organisation members encounter alienation in the absence of quality relationships, members may regulate themselves to overcome work alienation. We recommend managers gain the trust of organisation members by being honest and transparent with them. Moreover, managers should adopt an open-door policy for organisation members to feel comfortable when they have feedback, questions, or new thoughts. Finally, we suggest that managers should be more friendly to organisation members to establish quality relationships with them, which may subsequently lessen counterproductive work-related outcomes, e.g., work alienation.

This paper is organised as follows: first, an introduction is given at the outset of the paper to point out the research gap, rationale, and problems of the study, then it describes the theoretical background to the study and critically evaluates LMX, WA, and self-regulation to develop the hypotheses. The paper continues with the methodology section before reporting the results of the study, and then concludes with a discussion, a description of the limitations, the implications of the study, and possible future directions for this area of research.

# **Theoretical Background and Hypotheses**

In this research, our aim is to investigate the impact of tenure and LMX on the WA of Turkish private and public sector organisation members and the mediating role of these members' self-regulation, as well as the moderating effect of their tenure, on the relationship. In order to operationalise the study, we adopt the Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci/Ryan 1985) as the theoretical framework. To state briefly, SET is proposed to explain human behaviours in their social exchanges. SET suggests that people expect certain benefits when engaging in relationships. If benefits are sustained, and each party is happy with what is provided in the exchange, then their relationship will be maintained (Searle 2000). The primary reason for adoption is that SET helps us to understand the dynamic exchanges of relationships in the case of any interactions between leaders and organisation members where leader-member exchange emerges. We presume that higher quality LMX would reduce, and lower quality LMX would increase the WA of organisation members. More importantly, we consider whether the self-regulation of organisation members would mediate this relationship, a subject which to date remains untouched. We also benefit from Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is a macro-theory of human motivation that addresses a broad range of issues such as psychological needs, energy and vitality, wellbeing, and self-regulation (Deci/Ryan 1985). SDT proposes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs for individuals (Ryan/Deci 2000). Autonomy refers to a sense of initiative and ownership in one's undertakings. Competence is about a sense of mastery and efficacy in one's activities. It is identified as the feeling that one is capable, can succeed, and grow. Finally, relatedness, as an interpersonal dimension, refers to having a sense of belongingness, connection, and caring for and being cared for by those others (Deci/Ryan 2000). Drawing on SDT offers a basis from which to understand the underlying mechanisms of the LMX-WA relationship by providing insights into the satisfaction of needs. We believe that LMX qualities can be influential on members' need satisfaction. Thus, we build on this theoretical consideration that satisfaction of needs, especially the need of "relatedness" regarding the connection with the leader, may provide for the wellbeing and so for the alienation of organisation members. We also benefit from SDT, as it associates self-regulation and autonomous motivation, which has an influence on the feelings of alienation (Shantz et al. 2015).

## ***Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)***

Building on SET, LMX explains the leader-member relationship through the exchanges between the leader and the organisation member. The LMX theory suggests that leaders develop differentiated dyadic relationships and so exchange patterns with organisation members ranging from low-quality transactional relationships to high-quality socio-emotional relationships (Liden/Sparrowe/Wayne 1997; Sparrowe/Liden 1997). According to SET, social exchange relationship is characterised by a long-term investment, and the emphasis is on the socio-emotional aspects of exchange (Shore/Tetrick/Lynch/Barksdale 2006). Thus, high-quality LMX relationships involve the socio-emotional exchanges that go beyond the employment contract and are characterised by personal liking, mutual respect, trust, and long-term investment (Dansereau/Graen/Haga 1975; Liden et al. 1997; Kuvaas/Buch/Dysvik/Haerem 2012). Organisation members that have high-quality relationships tend to increase their efforts and go beyond the minimum job requirements as an expression of appreciation (Blau, 1964) for the increased investment (Shore et al. 2006). For instance, friendship, social support, information, and advice are identified as the social exchanges in the relationship (Dienesch/Liden 1986; Liden et al. 1997; Sparrowe/Liden 1997). Thus, high-quality LMX relationships lead to positive outcomes, such as decision influence (Scandura/Graen/Novak 1986), trust-based relationships (Bauer/Green 1996), satisfaction (Gerstner/Day 1997), salary progress (Wayne/Liden/Kraimer/Graf 1999), empowerment (Liden/Wayne/Sparrowe 2000), performance (Dunegan/Uhl-Bien/Duchon 2002), reduced turnover (Harris/Kacmar/Witt 2005), and citizenship behaviour (Ilies/Nahrgang/Morgeson 2007).

On the other hand, low-quality LMX relationships are based primarily on the employment contract and involve economic exchanges. Such relationships are formal and instrumental in nature, characterised by low personal involvement and interpersonal trust, and are generally short term (Liden/Sparrowe/Wayne 1997; Shore et al. 2006; Kuvaas et al. 2012). In low-quality LMX relationships, as members do not expect to receive many resources from their leaders, they may feel a certain psychological distance. Thus, they are more likely to perceive that their contributions are undervalued, develop negative job attitudes, and exhibit undesirable work behaviours (van Breukelen/Schyns/Le Blanc 2006; Hooper/Martin 2008), such as showing lower levels of performance (Gerstner/Day 1997), taking less responsibility (Liden/Graen 1980), or providing less support (Dansereau/Graen/Haga 1975).

In organisational settings, the relationship with the leader has an important impact on members' psychology. In terms of SDT, to the extent that individuals can find opportunities to pursue goals, domains, and relationships that allow or support the satisfaction of the three psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – they will experience positive psychological outcomes (Deci/Ryan 2000). More specifically, social contexts and conditions that support the satisfaction of these psychological needs enable autonomous motivation and wellbeing, integration, and individual growth (Ingledew/Markland/Sheppard 2004), whereas social contexts and conditions that thwart need satisfaction result in anxiety and mental health issues (Andersen/Chen/Carter 2000). In the work domain, leadership appears to be important in creating such context and conditions for employees (Gagné/Deci 2005). Various studies (e.g., Graves/Luciano 2013; Kuvaas/Buch 2019) emphasise the role of different LMX qualities in employee outcomes related to the satisfaction of psychological needs, motivation, and wellbeing. In this vein, with the integration of SDT as an underlying explanatory mechanism to gain an understanding of LMX (Andersen/Buch/Kuvaas 2020), LMX may explain the poor psychological wellbeing of employees, and thus feelings of alienation.

However, although LMX is known to have psychological effects on organisation members, studies examining the role of LMX relationships in reducing feelings of alienation amongst organisational members are very limited (e.g., Tanrıverdi/Kahraman 2016). Despite the fact that these initial studies are important steps, this line of research has not received sufficient attention in the existent literature. Thus, we believe that the understanding of the relationship between these two variables needs to be deepened in order to further the current understanding of WA and its underlying mechanisms. Below, we attempt to explain WA and the role of LMX on WA in their specifics.

## ***Work Alienation***

The alienation concept, which has a long history dating back to the works of Hegel (1807/1977) and Marx (1844/1969), is still one of the most significant topics pertaining to the 21st century workplace (Harvey 2018; Sawyer/Gampa 2020). The theoretical foundations of alienation are based on the capitalist mode of production that isolates the worker from his/her labour, self, and humanity. The recent definitions of alienation also follow Marx's conceptualisation and emphasise the disconnection of the worker from work, the context, or self (Twining 1980; Mottaz 1981; Hirschfeld/Field 2000; Banai et al. 2004; Nair/Vohra 2009).

While some theorists (e.g., Marx 1969; Braverman 1974) have emphasised the structural and technological conditions on alienation, others (e.g., Seeman 1959; Fischer 1976; Kanungo 1979; Ashforth 1989) have focused on the psychological or motivational aspects of alienation through the individual's perceptions, consciousness, and feelings. For instance, from a social-psychological standpoint, Seeman (1959) described work alienation (estrangement) as a psychological condition that occurs by working in jobs that require minimal talent and have little opportunity to make decisions. In his cornerstone work, Seeman (1959) constructed alienation as a multidimensional concept composed of five dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. Following the study of Seeman, Mottaz (1981) evaluated three dimensions as work-related, which are self-estrangement, powerlessness, and meaninglessness, and the other two dimensions as environmental factors that lead to alienation. Powerlessness and meaninglessness in particular are considered "the key psychological ingredients" of alienation (DeHart-Davis/Pandey 2005:133).

Various studies have revealed the influence of different styles of leadership (e.g., transformational, transactional, supportive, authoritarian) on work alienation (e.g., Sarros et al. 2002; Banai/Reisel 2003; Banai/Reisel 2007). These studies emphasised that leader behaviours can diminish followers' alienation in various ways; for instance, by encouraging them and fostering their sense of independence (Boerner 1998), by providing the needed instrumental and emotional resources, or reducing their role ambiguity (Chiaburu/Thundiyil/Wang 2014) by allowing unsafe behaviours through organisational cynicism (Jiang/Chen/Sun/Li 2009). At this point, considering the features of SET, it can be expected that these dimensions of alienation could be triggered by the quality of the leader-member relationship. Further, there have been calls for research that explores the link between leadership and work alienation (e.g., Kanungo 1998).

As former research revealed, social relationships at work are accepted to be one of the major antecedents of work alienation (e.g., Shantz et al. 2015). From this perspective, as a particular form of social relationships at work, considering the features of SET, the quality of the LMX could be a driver of work alienation. SDT may also provide accounts for the experience of alienation with its integration to LMX. The theory suggests that if any of the three psychological needs are not supported or prevented within a social context, wellbeing will be strongly affected. Especially in terms of the satisfaction of relatedness need, SDT may provide insight into the association between LMX and WA. As an interpersonal dimension, relatedness need refers to having a sense of belongingness, connection, and caring for and being cared for by those others (Deci/Ryan 1985, 2000). In this vein, by ensuring care, interest, and social ties, a high-quality LMX relationship can enable organisation members to generate close and deep connections and satisfy their needs of relatedness. On the contrary, a formal relationship offers organisation members little opportunity to develop close ties and connections, so the need for relatedness is unlikely to be satisfied (Graves/Luciano 2013). Thus, a poor-quality relationship with the leader, based on a low interaction and ineffective communication, may cause disconnection and also result in members experiencing lowered organisational commitment and citizenship behaviours (Erdogan/Liden 2002). For instance, Nair and Vohra (2010) identify a lack of meaningful work, the inability to work to allow for self-expression, and poor-quality work relationships as the strongest predictors of work alienation for knowledge workers. So, if the organisation member fails to satisfy a member’s need for relatedness as a result of a low-quality LMX relationship, this may lead to him/her feeling isolated, and thus alienated.

SDT brings the aspect of motivation to the needs satisfaction issue by recognising the differences between intrinsic (innate) and extrinsic (external) motivation. According to the theory, when a task fulfilled to obtain a tangible reward, the motivation behind the activity is extrinsic, whereas if the task is completed for the innate satisfaction that the activity naturally provides to an individual, the motivation behind it is intrinsic (Deci/Dyan 2000). The theory argues that individuals with satisfied psychological needs are associated with high levels of intrinsic motivation, which is also associated with positive outcomes (Sheldon/Elliot/Kim/Kasser 2001). Thus, the conditions supporting the individual's experience of needs satisfaction may foster the volitional and high-quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities (Baard/Deci/Ryan 2004; Vansteenkiste/Neyrinck/Niemiec/Soenens/De Witte/van den Broeck 2007), and so may reduce alienation. In terms of LMX, a low-quality LMX relationship may thwart needs satisfaction, whereas a high-quality LMX relationship may support the satisfaction of individuals' psychological needs. Especially when the level of connection between the leader and the organisation member is considered, the need for relatedness may be strongly influenced by the LMX qualities, which can influence feeling of alienation. Regarding these interpretations, we expect that LMX would impact organisation members' feelings of alienation. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H1: LMX negatively affects work alienation.*

## ***Self-Regulation***

From a psychological perspective, one particular essential trait is considered to be the capacity of human beings to alter or control their own behaviours (Bandura 1991; Baumeister/Heatherton 1996). Bandura (1991) explains that humans are able to control their behaviour through the "self-regulation" process, which is explained as self-altering one's own responses or inner states by overriding a response with a more desirable one (Baumeister/Schmeichel/Vohs 2007). The self-regulation process consists of controlling and modifying one's own thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in adaptive ways. It refers to the "exercise of control over oneself, especially with regard to bringing the self into line with preferred standards" (Vohs/Baumeister 2004).

Self-regulation has been studied through the different perspectives of social and cognitive psychology (Hofmann/Asnaani/Vonk/Sawyer/Fang 2012) in various areas such as learning skills and academic success (Zimmerman 1989; Zimmerman/Shunk 2011), physical health (Leventhal/Ian 2012), psychological health and wellbeing (Muraven/Baumeister 2000; McCullough/Willoughby 2009), and also leadership (Hamstra/van Yperen/Wisse/Sassenberg 2011; Sassanberg/Hamstra 2017; Johnson/Lin/Lee 2018; Kark/van Dijk 2019)

Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco and Twenge (2005) emphasise that rejection may impair self-regulation as it exists for the sake of securing and maintaining social acceptance. According to them, people who are rejected perform worse with regard to self-regulation. Relatedly, Baumeister et al. (2007:533) highlight the importance of social connection and note that "when people are socially excluded, they act as if they no longer find it worthwhile to regulate themselves". The impact of rejection may lead the person "to be disgruntled and unwilling to make an effort and sacrifices required for self-regulation or even cause the self-regulation system to stop working, independent of any conscious or deliberate reaction by the individual'' (Baumeister et al. 2005:590-591).

SDT suggests that motivational orientations that guide behaviour have important consequences for healthy self-regulation. Thus, according to the theory, interpersonal contexts that provide opportunities to satisfy the basic psychological needs can promote self-regulation and those that hinder satisfaction can impair self-regulation (Deci/Ryan/Williams 1996). So, considering organisational settings, leadership can be accepted as important to the creation of an environment that facilitates the satisfaction of psychological needs and that validates the self (Deci/Ryan 2000; Gagné 2003). For instance, Sassenberg and Hamstra (2017) reveal that leadership behaviour may encourage employee's self-regulation. In other words, leadership styles (i.e., transformational and transactional) influence members' self-regulatory preferences toward changing their regulatory focus and may allow their self-regulation to sustain or become disrupted.

Thus, consistent with SET, high-quality leader-member exchanges may have an effect on the organisation members' self-regulation processes; how they control and alter their own thoughts, behaviours, or feelings. When a follower lacks and covets something possessed or experienced by others in the organisation, self-regulatory depletion may occur (Koopman/Lin/Lennard/Matta/Johnson 2019). More specifically, it is possible to expect an organisation member who does not perceive there to be good quality LMX to show self-regulation failure. On the other hand, an organisation member who perceives LMX to be a high-quality relationship with her/his leader may perform self-regulation with feelings of social acceptance and social connection (Baumeister et al. 2007). Taking these discussions into account, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H2: LMX positively affects self-regulation.*

Self-regulation comprises various psychological skills related to decision control, self-motivation, and mood management. It is related to exercising control over oneself, especially with regard to aligning the self in line with preferred standards (Vohs/Baumeister 2004). The ability to self-regulate plays a significant role in the development of wellbeing as it enables the individual to prevent undesired responses. Congruent with SDT, self-determinate individuals are highly self-regulated; they have the ability to show psychological coherence and adapt to their environment (Deci/Ryan 2000). According to theory, when individuals are able to satisfy the three psychological needs, they tend to show an autonomous mode of self-regulation. Thus, autonomous self-regulation and enhanced self-regulation abilities facilitate the process of behavioural change and promote adaptation, autonomous motivation, and engagement (Ryan/Deci 2006; 2017; Reeve/Ryan/Deci/Jang 2008).

On the other hand, when need satisfaction is hampered, individuals show an alienated mode of self-regulation that allows inner conflict. The failure of self-regulation leads to undesirable behaviours that have significant health-related, economic, or social impacts (Baumeister et al. 2007). Individuals may engage in maladaptive behaviours and experience negative psychological situations such as psychological fragmentation, lack of harmony or alienation (Niemiec/Ryan/Patrick/Deci/Williams 2010).

Regarding alienation to be in line with Marx's conceptualisation as a motivational-emotional state in which the individual ignores her or his intrinsic needs and desires, it is possible to expect an association between the failure of self-regulation and alienation. As self-regulation refers to the ability to modulate emotional responses and respond to challenging situations more effectively, it is considered essential to success, personal development, and individual growth in modern work organisations (Lord/Diefendorff/Schmidt/Hall 2010). An organisation member with a greater ability to self-regulate, who can manage his/herself and control work-related behaviours, may generate a sense of greater wellbeing (Lord et al. 2010), less emotional exhaustion, and so feel less alienated (Shantz et al. 2014). Considering that self-regulation is associated with adjustment of behaviours (Niemiec et al. 2010), we expect that the self-regulation of organisation members would affect alienation from work in a negative manner. More specifically, as self-regulation can be a significant predictor of workplace behaviour, the ability to self-regulate may help organisation members to adjust and reduce their feelings of alienation. Following the theoretical arguments embedded in the Self-Determination Theory and self-regulation, we propose the following hypothesis in the light of prior studies:

*H3: Self-regulation negatively affects work alienation.*

In terms of SDT, self-regulation is associated with social functioning and adjustment. The capacity to self-regulate allows individuals to be more adaptable and to compete with life’s challenges. Miller and Byrnes (2001) assert that decision-making competency, which is characterised by the tendency to be self-regulated, is the best predictor of individuals' social behaviour. A self-regulated decision maker is competent at paying attention to adaptive goals and the decision processes that lead to the achievement of their goals in complex environments such as organisations.

As stated above, self-regulation supports behavioural persistence and performance and psychological wellbeing (Niemiec et al. 2010). Therefore, highly self-regulated organisation members should be able to better use their adjustment skills in the context of the conditions they face in the workplace. Given the desire to adapt to their environment, self-regulation suggests that individuals consciously attempt to control behaviour in an effort to mediate outcomes (Baumeister et al. 2007). In other words, self-regulatory activities can mediate the relationships between individuals and the context and their overall achievement (Wolters/Pintrich/Karabenick 2005).

The mediation role of self-regulation is articulated in various studies. For instance, Taura, Abdullah, Roslan and Omar (2014) revealed a significant mediating role of self-regulation in the relationship between self-efficacy, task value, and active procrastination. Evans/Fuller-Rowell/Doan (2012) illustrated the mediating effect of self-regulation in the association between childhood cumulative risk and obesity. Morosanova and Fomina (2017) demonstrated that conscious self-regulation acts as a mediator of students' anxiety influence on exam results. Padilla-Walker, Harper and Jensen (2010) reported that self-regulation partially mediated the relationship between sibling affection and positive and negative adolescent outcomes. These studies provide evidence that self-regulation serves as a mediator in the psychological functioning of individuals.

The potential mediating role of self-regulation on an individual's behaviour brings us back to the connection between different qualities of LMX and alienation. As self-regulation may function as a catalyst that assists organisation members towards better psychological functioning, the capacity to self-regulate may allow organisation members to manage their cognitions, emotions, and behaviours, and adjust their responses to the relationship with their leader. They may choose appropriate regulation strategies to enhance the LMX relationship and manage the consequences. Accordingly, self-regulation may play an important mediating role that boosts the influence of LMX towards WA. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H4: Self-regulation mediates the relationship between LMX and WA.*

## ***Tenure***

Tenure is a demographic variable that is defined as the period of time for which an individual has worked for their employer. Tenure, as a demographic and moderator variable, has played a valuable role in management and organisational behaviour research (Cohen 1993). There are various studies that have chosen tenure as a moderator in relation to other constructs (Shirom/Shechter Gilboa/Fried/Cooper 2008). After reviewing prior studies that involved tenure, it emerged that tenure is a significant situational variable (Boğan/Dedeoğlu 2017) that affects various workplace relationships, which is also the case for LMX. For instance, Kim, Liu and Diefendorff (2015) suggest that quality of LMX may be more robust for newer organisation members. Congruent with SET, newcomers tend to establish quality relationships with their leaders in the first months, as they feel more motivated and accepting of the new environment.

Regarding the moderating effects of tenure, prior research found that tenure moderates employee behaviour relationships (Wright/Bonett 2002). One study suggests that tenure has a moderating role on the relationship between psychological contract breach and affective commitment of employees (Agarwal/Bhargava 2013). Similarly, various studies have examined the moderating effect of tenure between LMX and other variables such as job performance (Kim et al. 2015) and promotability ratings (Harris/Kacmar/Clarson 2006). Past studies do not show any evidence if tenure moderating the relationship between LMX and WA. In other words, research demonstrates that tenure has moderated the aforementioned relationships, yet there is no empirical evidence in the literature that has examined tenure as a moderator on the relationship between LMX and WA. Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

 *H5: Tenure moderates the relationship between LMX and WA.*

Studies reveal that LMX perceptions differ by sector due to their different dynamics. As organisations that operate in the public sector are perceived to be political contexts (Bodla/Danish 2008; Vigoda-Gadot/Kapun 2005), organisation members tend to "become part of the political climate and merge in it" (Vigoda-Gadot/Beeri 2012:217). Hence, the social exchanges of psychological benefits between leaders and organisation members become essential as well as economic exchanges. Thus, high-quality LMX relationships are reported to be more critical in the public sector as they can help organisation members to overcome various difficulties in interpersonal relationships. For instance, in their study where they focus on the healthcare context, Brunetto/Shacklock/Bartram/Leggat/Farr-Wharton/Stanton/Casimir (2012) reveal that the quality of LMX appears to be crucial in the public sector – with regard to the relationship between empowerment and affective commitment – than in private the sector for nurses. Similarly, Audenaert/Decramer/George/Verschuere/van Waeyenberg (2016) demonstrate that those organisation members who perceive high-quality LMX feel safer discussing problems in the public sector. Moreover, in terms of work alienation, studies suggest that organisation members are less alienated in work environments where a consultative management style and participative decision-making mechanisms are adopted (e.g., Sarros et al. 2002). In this sense, due to the hierarchical and centralised dynamics of public workplaces, public employees are regarded more likely to feel they do not have any influence over their jobs (Tummers/Bekkers/van Thiel/Steijn 2015). In light of previous studies, we expect that organisation members from two different sectors would provide more insight into the impact of the sector on the relationships within the whole research model. Moreover, we regard a multi-group analysis as an essential technique to reveal the influence of working in different sectors on the linkages in our model. Based on the given discussion, we posit the following hypothesis:

*H6: There is a difference between public and private sector organisation members in terms of the whole proposed model.*

Please see our proposed research model in Figure 1 based on the established hypotheses.



Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

# **Method**

## ***Research Design and Analytical Procedure***

In this study, we adopted the cross-sectional research method. Within this context, we attempted to reveal the relationship between LMX, work alienation and self-regulation. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed (Ringle/Wende/Becker 2015) to test the proposed model. Wetzels, Odekerken-Schröder and van Oppen (2009:190) asserted: "model complexity does not pose as severe a restriction to PLS path-modelling as to covariance-based SEM since PLS path-modelling at any moment only estimates a subset of parameters." Since this research is "predictive explanatory" according to the criteria of Henseler (2018), we utilised PLS-SEM as the method of analysis for the following three reasons: “(1) to test a theoretical framework from a prediction perspective; (2) to examine increased complexity by exploring theoretical extensions of established theories” (Hair et al. 2019: 5); and (3) to test the mediating effect (Hair et al. 2017). We employed the SPSS version 25 software to test normality, perform running factor analysis, and examine common method bias, whilst we utilized SmartPLS 3.2.9 to analyse the proposed model.

## ***Context, Participants, and Sampling***

Studying within the Turkish context is intriguing as it is an emerging economy whose cultural and social values are being rapidly transformed. Turkey has been considered a collectivist country, yet it is shifting towards an individualist culture in which people's attitudes and behaviours are valued to capture this transformation in society as well as at work (Wasti 2002). Turkey's unique position, where it is rooted in both Asia and Europe, provides rich insights and vivid details about people's behaviours. The participants of this study have consisted of public and private sector employees and middle managers from the Eastern part of Turkey. We considered both employees and middle managers to be organisation members in relation to their leaders. We had a short definition for each variable to minimise social desirability bias (Podsakoff/MacKenzie/Lee/Podsakoff 2003). For LMX, we included a definition of leadership and, based on that, we asked the participants to answer by considering their leaders. Hence, they replied to the questionnaires by thinking about the interactions with their leaders.

According to Law No. 657 on State Civil Servants, those who work in Turkey’s public sector are considered public servants. It is very difficult to dismiss public servants except in instances of committing disgraceful crimes based on Turkish legislation (Sural 2005). They have lifetime job security, and higher salaries with additional benefits compared to those who work in the private sector. Moreover, when civil servants retire, they are paid a substantial bonus in addition to their pension (Top/Akdere/Tarcan 2015). Based on the salient differences of sectors, it was interesting to investigate how participants behave in different sectors.

In terms of sampling, we followed the Convenience Sampling method to conduct this research in the Eastern part of Turkey as it provided several benefits in terms of accessibility and availability. The main reason for choosing Convenience Sampling is that it is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility (Bryman 2016). To enhance the external validity and representativeness of data collection, we considered different types of business (i.e., private and public sector) and sizes (e.g., small and medium) of organisation. The data was collected via the Google Forms data collection platform from the four biggest cities in the region, i.e., Erzurum, Van, Elazığ and Malatya. According to Evans and Mathur (2005:197), the major strengths of online data collection are "flexibility, speed and timeliness, convenience, ease of data entry and analysis, ease of follow-up, controlled sampling, large sample, easy to obtain, and question diversity". We preferred to deliver the questionnaires online because of the above-mentioned strengths of this method. We distributed the survey to 1100 organisation members (employees and middle managers). Since we asked employees and middle managers to evaluate their relationships with their leaders, we did not distribute the questionnaires to upper-level managers, such as CEOs. Initially, a sample of 324 respondents participated in the surveys. However, 12 questionnaires were not included in the analysis because most of their items were either unanswered or answered with the same pattern. Also, two of the questionnaires were not included in the evaluation because they constituted outliers according to the Mahalanobis distance determination method. Thus, we obtained 310 useful questionnaires with a response rate of 28.18%. The questionnaires that we distributed had a cover section that included a statement of the purpose of the study, absolute confidentiality, and that participation was voluntary in order to minimise social desirability bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In this way, we intended to make the participants more comfortable with regard to sharing their true feelings.

The demographic structure of the participants was as follows: 39% of participants were female (*n* = 121), and 61% of participants were male (*n* = 189). 66.1% of participants (*n* = 205) reported that they work in the public sector, while 33.9% work in the private sector (*n* = 105). 86.1% of respondents were employees (*n* = 267), and 13.9% were middle managers (*n* = 43). The mean age of the participants was 32.64 years, and the mean tenure of their current jobs was 5.5 years.

In terms of defining sample size, we followed the Power Analysis procedure (Faul/Erdfelder/Lang/Buchner 2007). In this context, we utilized the G\*Power v3.1.9.6 software to calculate the sample size. We assessed that a sample size of 86 was sufficient, with a statistical power of 0.95 for each group. Our sample size exceeded the sample size threshold for each group according to the power analysis, as the minimum power requirement is 0.8 (Rasoolimanesh/Roldán/Jaafar/Ramayah 2017).

## ***Measures***

In this study, we used the scale developed by Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) to collect data for the LMX variable. This scale consists of seven items. Sample items are "My manager has enough confidence in me that he/she would defend and justify my decisions if I was not present to do so" and "My manager understands my problems and needs".

To measure the perception of work alienation, the scale developed by Nair and Vohra (2009) was employed in our study. The scale has eight items. Some example items are "I do not enjoy my work" and "I do not feel like putting in my best effort at work".

The self-regulation variable was measured using the seven-item self-regulation scale developed by Luszczynska, Diehl, Gutiérrez-Dona, Kuusinen, and Schwarzer (2004). Sample items are "If an activity arouses my feelings too much, I can calm myself down so that I can continue with the activity soon" and "I can control my thoughts from distracting me from the task at hand". Tenure was considered to be a moderating variable in the research model. We used gender and age as control variables. Besides this, we conducted a multi-group analysis by sector variable to compare the private and public sectors. All the scales were five-point Likert-type (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree). The original scales were translated from English to Turkish using the parallel blind technique (Brislin 1980). We asked two translators who were fluent in the two languages to translate the scales. First, they independently prepared their versions; after that, they compared the two separate translations. They finalised the translations after resolving the differences that occurred during their meeting. The translators presented the final version of the scales to us, which was used for this study.

## ***Assessment of Common Method Bias Test***

As we collected the data from all the organisation members simultaneously, it was anticipated that common method variance (CMV) would be a problem. We conducted the single factor test of Harman (1967) in order to test for CMV. Accordingly, in the principal component analysis, all items were analyzed under a single factor without rotation (Podsakoff et al. 2003) using the SPSS software. The extent of the explained variance was 31.34%. Since this value was below 50%, we concluded that there was no common method bias in this study (Kline, 2005). Next, we adopted Kock's (2015) full collinearity assessment method, which is highly suited to PLS studies in terms of the detection potential common method bias (CMB). Kock (2015: 7) states that "the occurrence of a VIF greater than 3.3 is proposed an indication of pathological collinearity, and also an indication that a model may be contaminated by common method bias. Therefore, if all VIFs resulting from a full collinearity test is equal to or lower than 3.3, the model can be considered free of common method bias." Since our estimations showed that VIF values ranged from 1.080 to 2.964, common method bias does not appear to be a significant problem in this research.

# ***Results***

## ***Assessment of Measurement Model - Validity and Reliability Tests***

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was executed through the Promax rotation method to control the factor composition of variables. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value was found to be 0.868 at the executed EFA, and the Bartlett test was significant (χ2 = 3260.529; df = 231; p < 0.001). According to the three-dimensional composition of the pattern matrix, we identified that scales showed an appropriate distribution to the original form.

Next, a measurement model was established to assess the construct reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2017). First, we checked the factor loadings of the indicators. According to Hair et al. (2017: 128), “an indicator's outer loading should be greater than 0.708 because this number squared (0.7082) is greater than 0.50. When their outer loading is below 0.70, researchers should carefully examine the effects of item removal on the composite reliability, as well as on the content validity of the construct rather than automatically eliminating indicators”. According to this criterion, we removed the first indicator of the LMX scale, which is "I usually know where I stand with my manager" and the last indicator of the WA scale, which is "I do not feel connected to the events in my workplace" because both items' outer loadings were significantly below the threshold of 0.708 (outer loading of LMX scale's first indicator was 0.533 and the last indicator of the WA scale's outer loading was 0.333). After removing these indicators, we assessed Average Variance Extracted (AVE) metric values for convergent validity and found that they were above the critical point of 0.50; thus, we stopped removing indicators. For the purposes of reliability, we estimated whether the Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha (Hair/Hult/Ringle/Sarstedt 2017; Hair et al. 2019), and rho\_a (Dijkstra/Henseler 2015) values exceeded their 0.70 thresholds. As can be seen in Table 1, after removing the LMX1 and WA8 items, our measurement model achieves convergent validity and reliability criteria.

Table 1. Convergent validity and reliability estimates

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Indicator** | **Loading** | **Alpha** | **Rho\_A** | **CR** | **AVE** |
| **LMX** | LMX2 | 0.737 | 0.903 | 0.910 | 0.900 | 0.603 |
| LMX3 | 0.782 |   |   |   |   |
| LMX4 | 0.722 |   |   |   |   |
| LMX5 | 0.737 |   |   |   |   |
| LMX6 | 0.965 |   |   |   |   |
| LMX7 | 0.684 |   |   |   |   |
| **Self-Regulation** | SR1 | 0.807 | 0.901 | 0.901 | 0.900 | 0.562 |
| SR2 | 0.759 |   |   |   |   |
| SR3 | 0.670 |   |   |   |   |
| SR4 | 0.782 |   |   |   |   |
| SR5 | 0.750 |   |   |   |   |
| SR6 | 0.736 |   |   |   |   |
| SR7 | 0.738 |   |   |   |   |
| **Work Alienation** | WA1 | 0.778 | 0.902 | 0.904 | 0.901 | 0.567 |
| WA2 | 0.778 |   |   |   |   |
| WA3 | 0.738 |   |   |   |   |
| WA4 | 0.846 |   |   |   |   |
| WA5 | 0.708 |   |   |   |   |
| WA6 | 0.764 |   |   |   |   |
| WA7 | 0.641 |   |   |   |   |

As seen in Table 1, the reliability and convergent validity values in the measurement model are within acceptable limits. The final step in evaluating the measurement model was to assess discriminant validity (Hair et al. 2019). To this end, we applied the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell/Larcker 1981) and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) approach (Henseler/Ringle/Sarstedt 2015). Regarding the Fornell-Larcker criterion, "the square root of the AVE value of each construct should be greater than its correlation with other constructs". Henseler et al. (2015) stated that the HTMT value should be less than 0.85 to achieve discriminant validity. Table 2 reports the discriminant validity results, where our model met both the discriminant validity criteria.

Table 2. Discriminant validity of constructs

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Construct** | **LMX** | **SR** | **WA** |
| *Fornell and Larcker's discriminant validity criteria* |
| LMX | **0.777** |   |   |
| SR | 0.379 | **0.750** |   |
| WA | -0.431 | -0.465 | **0.758** |
| *Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) discriminant validity criteria* |
| LMX |  |   |   |
| SR | 0.373 |  |   |
| WA | 0.424 | 0.462 |  |

Values in bold typeface are the square roots of AVE, whilst off‐diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs.

## ***Assessment of Structural Model - Hypotheses Tests***

In the structural model, a bootstrap procedure with 10,000 iterations was used to evaluate the significance of the hypotheses (Streukens/Leroi-Werelds 2016). We assessed VIF values for the collinearity diagnostic. Hair et al. (2019) state that VIF values of exogenous constructs should not be greater than 5. Moreover, values of less than 3.3 are perfectly fine for collinearity. Our assessment of collinearity showed that VIF values among exogenous constructs were below 3. In this respect, there is no concern with regard to collinearity in our model.

Next, we measured the coefficient values according to the recommended level of the t-statistics value (Hair et al. 2017). Commonly used critical values for two-tailed tests are 1.96 (significance level = 5%) and 2.57 (significance level = 1%). The PLS does not generate overall goodness-of-fit indices. Henseler, Hubona and Ray (2016a) recommend applying SRMR as the convenient model-fitting criterion. For the PLS models, an SRMR value below 0.08 is sufficient. In our model, we observed an SRMR of 0.059 for the estimated model, which is in an acceptable range for model fit.

We measured the coefficient of determination (R2) to evaluate the structural model. The R2 is the squared correlation of actual and predicted values and, as such, includes all the data that have been used for model estimation to judge the model's predictive power, which also represents a measure of in-sample predictive power (Sarstedt/Ringle/Henseler/Hair 2014; Hair et al. 2017). Further, we adopted Q2 for cross-validated redundancy and f2 for effect size. The results of the structural model are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Effects on endogenous constructs

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Construct** | **Direct Effect** | ***t*-Value** | ***p*-Value** | **PCI** | **f2** | **Supported** |
| **Path coefficients and bootstrapping** |
| H1: LMX 🡪 WA |  -0.326 | 5.178 | 0.000  | [-0.449, -0.202] | 0.131  | Yes |
| H2: LMX 🡪 SR |  0.378 | 5.951  |  0.000 |  [0.250, 0.500] |  0.026 | Yes |
| H3: SR 🡪 WA |  -0.345 | 5.414  |  0.000 | [-0.467, -0.216] |  0.149 | Yes |
| H5: Tenure\*LMX🡪WA |  0.137 |  2.067 |  0.039 |  [0.013, 0.273] |  0.026 | Yes |
| CV: Age 🡪 WA |  -0.115 | 1.839  |  0.066 | [-0.244, 0.003]  |  0.014 | No |
| CV: Gender 🡪 WA |  -0.025 |  0.465 |  0.642 |  [-0.126, 0.083] |  0.001 | No |
| **Endogenous constructs assessment** |
|  |  | R2 | R2 Adjusted | Q2 |
| Work Alienation | 0.324 | 0.310 | 0.164 |
| Self-Regulation | 0.143 | 0.140 | 0.074 |

CV = Control variable

As shown in Table 3, H1, H2, H3, and H5 are supported. The predictive accuracy of the model is confirmed by the R2 and Q2 values. According to Merli, Preziosi, Acompara and Ali (2019: 175), “values below 0.25 indicate a weak accuracy, below 0.50 indicate a moderate accuracy, and below 0.75 show a substantial predictive accuracy”. Our model explains 32.4% of work alienation and 14.3% of self-regulation. The Stone-Geisser Q² values were then obtained to quantify the predictive relevance. The Q² values for WA and SR are 0.164 and 0.074, respectively. Finally, the effect size was assessed. Appendix 1 displays our final model, coefficients, and significance of variables.

## ***Testing the Mediation Effect***

To estimate the role of SR as a mediator of LMX and WA, we conducted the bootstrapping method following Baron and Kenny's (1986) standard procedure. According to the mediation effect analysis, H4 is supported. These results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation effect analysis

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Hypotheses** | **Total Effect** | ***p* Value** | **Direct Effect** | ***p* Value** | **Indirect Effect** | ***p* Value** | **Supported** |
| H4: LMX 🡪 SR 🡪 WA | -0.443 | 0.000 | -0.297 | 0.000 | -0.134 | 0.000 | Yes |

## ***Multi-Group Analysis (MGA)***

To compare public and private sector organisation members' perception of LMX, WA, and SR, we ran permutation-based multi-group analysis (Chin/Dibbern 2010) and Henseler's MGA (Henseler/Ringle/Sinkovics 2009). Before running MGA, we followed the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) approach (Henseler/Ringle/Sarstedt 2016b: 412) in which we followed three steps: “(1) configural invariance; (2) compositional invariance; and (3) the equality of composite mean values and variances”. Following this basis, these three steps need to be successfully run between groups to achieve a full establishment invariance. Based on our results, the means and variances of the composites across the public and private sector were not equal, and we established a partial measurement invariance (Henseler et al. 2016b). The results of invariance measurement testing are given in Appendix 3. Table 5 also illustrates the MGA findings from the use of Henseler's MGA (Henseler et al. 2009) and the permutation test (Chin/Dibbern 2010).

Table 5. Multi-group analysis results

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Relationship** | **Path Coefficient** | **Path Coefficient Difference** | ***P*-value Difference****(one-tailed)** | **Supported** |
| **Public** | **Private** | **Henseler's MGA** | **Permutation test** |
| CV: Age 🡪 WA | -0.238 | 0.096 | -0.334 | 0.014 | 0.004 | Yes/Yes |
| CV: Gender🡪WA | -0.008 | -0.030 | 0.021 | 0.990 | 0.412 | No/No |
| LMX🡪SR | 0.389 | 0.118 | 0.271 | 0.018 | 0.008 | Yes/Yes |
| LMX🡪WA | -0.327 | -0.322 | -0.004 | 0.907 | 0.460 | No/No |
| LMX\*Tenure🡪WA | -0.044 | 0.237 | -0.192 | 0.128 | 0.077 | No/No |
| SR🡪WA | -0.272 | -0.342 | 0.070 | 0.601 | 0.305 | No/No |
| Tenure🡪WA | 0.125 | -0.046 | 0.171 | 0.202 | 0.134 | No/No |

CV: Control Variable

The results of the multi-group analysis (see Table 5) show that according to two groups (public and private sector groups), the relationship between Age and WA and LMX and SR differs. According to our findings, an increase in age decreases WA in the public sector. The age variable does not affect WA in the private sector. Further, while LMX perception has a higher impact on the SR in the public sector, the effect of the perception of LMX on SR is lower in the private sector. MGA analysis results suggest that there are no other significant differences between the public and private sectors. As a result of multi-group analysis, H6 is only partially supported.

# **Discussion**

The aim of the study was to propose a novel research model to examine the impact of tenure and LMX on WA, and the mediating role of SR and moderating role of tenure on the relationship. With a theoretical model benefiting from Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci/Ryan 2000), we attempted to examine how the quality of the relationship between organisation members and their leaders affects the alienation of organisation members. We also investigated the mediating role of organisation members' SR on the relationship between LMX and WA. In addition, to enhance the results of our research, we performed a multi-group analysis that focused on salient differences between the private and public sectors. To the best of our knowledge, our model can be regarded as the first time SR has been used as a mediator and tenure as a moderator. In our research, the emerging results supported our hypotheses and made contributions to the current research streams in the areas of SR, LMX, and WA. We found that SR can play a mediating role in the relationship between LMX and WA. We also found that tenure has a moderating effect on the relationship between LMX and WA. We will first discuss the results in the following paragraphs and then their contributions in the following section of the paper.

First, we focused on the relationship between LMX and WA. Our results showed that there is a significant effect of LMX on WA. We found that LMX is a predictor of WA, and there is a negative association between LMX and WA. These results are in line with those of previous studies (Banai/Reisel 2007; Nair/Vohra 2010; Finney/Finney/Maes 2018), which illustrate that a good relationship with leaders can diminish the WA of organisation members. Consistent with SET and SDT, we found that organisation members who have a higher perception of good exchange relationship with their leaders had lower WA, which extends the current knowledge by bringing more evidence to the literature (Tanriverdi/Kahraman 2016; Can 2019). Second, based on the findings, LMX had a significant effect on SR. This can be interpreted in terms of the way in which organisation members gain resources and regulate their behaviours. In other words, we found that having a high-quality relationship with a leader provides emotional as well as cognitive resources to organisation members as they can regulate their behaviours based on these resources (Jawahar/Schreurs/Mohammed 2018). From this point of view, this finding is a solid contribution to the literature, it joining other positive outcomes of LMX such as job embeddedness (Harris/Wheeler/Kacmar 2011). Moreover, this result is congruent with prior studies (Shaalan/Elsaid/Elsaid 2019), as they similarly found that LMX has a positive and direct impact on SR.

Third, another focus was to examine the association between SR and WA, the existence of which the results confirmed. Based on this finding, participants with self-regulation failures would be more likely to show estrangement from work, whereas employees with solid self-regulatory practices would not be alienated from their work. This outcome was one of the most important contributions of this paper, which extends the LMX, SR, and WA literatures (Eisenberger/Fasolo/Davis-LaMastro 1990; Marshall/Michaels/Mulki 2007). The outcome broadly supported the work of similar studies, which provided the predictors and outcomes of WA according to different variables (Chiaburu et al. 2014).

Fourth, the present study was designed to determine the mediating role of SR on the relationship between LMX and WA, as no previous research has attempted to examine this role. We wondered if self-regulation would show a mediating effect while LMX qualities were influencing WA. We found that SR was mediating the relationship between LMX and WA. Since SR is a construct to control individuals' responses, needs, or feelings when they encounter a situation (Baumeister et al. 2007), this finding can be interpreted in the sense that having a stronger psychological state would play a role in not being alienated from their work. This is one of the most important contributions to the literature given the limited empirical research on SR and its mediating role with other variables.

Fifth, we focused on whether tenure would moderate the relationship between LMX and WA. For this purpose, we conducted a moderation analysis, results of which (please see Appendix 2 for the Slope Matrix) show that tenure dampens the negative relationship between LMX and WA. Based on these results, we found that LMX is not sufficient in itself to prevent WA when tenure increases. This finding provided support for the moderating role of tenure, which is consistent with similar research (Kim et al. 2015).

MGA results show that the effect of the age variable on WA and the effect of LMX on SR differ by sector. According to the findings, age has a negative effect on WA in the public sector, whereas age does not affect WA significantly in the private sector. In other words, it can be concluded that the greater one’s age, the lower the WA in the public sector. Another significant difference occurs for the LMX and SR relationship in which LMX has a stronger effect on SR for the public sector than the private sector.

# **Conclusion**

This paper demonstrated that organisation members in both the private and public sectors encounter estrangement from their work, which has long been a detrimental issue (Tummers/den Dulk 2011). Considering the foundations of work alienation, which dates back to works of Hegel (1807/1977) and Marx (1844/1969), it can be seen that alienation is conceptualised as a state of psychological disengagement. Marx described alienation as an objective condition in which employees become isolated having given up their desire for self-expression at work (Nelson/O'Donohue 2006). From a more psychological standpoint – through the five dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement – work alienation has been identified as a psychological syndrome that causes a loss of connection with one's feelings and self-requirements (Seeman 1959). While past research has articulated the various work-related and personal antecedents of work alienation, e.g., poor job conditions (Banai/Reisel 2007), injustice (Sulu et al. 2010), locus of control (Banai et al. 2004), or achievement orientation (Hirschfeld 2002), recent studies drew attention to the role of social relations at work (e.g., Shantz et al. 2015). In this sense, a lack of meaningful relationships with others appears to be a driver of work alienation. Hence, our study highlighted that having quality relationships with leaders and feeling a sense of connection with them at work can reduce alienation. Thus, the relationship between the leader and organisational members appears to influence feelings of alienation, as leaders can diminish members' alienation by providing the needed emotional resources and support (Chiaburu et al. 2014). Moreover, considering alienation as a subjective "state of mind" (Blauner 1964) rather than Marx's "objective reality" conceptualisation, our research showed that the person's ability to regulate their feelings can have an influence on feelings of alienation.

The contribution of this research is twofold; the first is theoretical, whilst the latter is methodological. First, this study addresses the gaps in the literature and extends our knowledge about LMX, WA, and SR in the following ways. It is surprising that no empirical attempts have previously been made to investigate possible mediating mechanisms of SR. By testing the hypotheses, our research model not only enhances our understanding of WA but also the capability of SR. It can be inferred that SR can create a basis for overcoming work alienation even though low LMX. SET is proposed to provide explanations of human behaviours in the social exchange processes (Cropanzano/Mitchell 2005), as generally based on pragmatism and mutual benefits of individual exchanges (Emerson 1976). In the context of the present study, organisation members offer their labour or loyalty, and they expect to receive the empowerment of, or better relations with their leaders. For these relationships, we argued that those organisation members with higher SR behaviours are unlikely to be alienated from work even though they have lower quality LMX. This interesting finding contributes to the existing knowledge of SET and SDT by extending it through the concept of SR. For the methodological contribution, this is the first inquiry to date to investigate the relationship between LMX and WA and SR as a mediator in this relationship using the smartPLS software and MGA, which are advanced tools to compare two distinct groups.

Our findings have important implications for policy and practice. First, our analysis suggests that leaders should be helpful in building a higher quality of LMX. They should treat organisation members fairly, and provide effective communication and voice mechanisms in the organisation. Second, in light of results, organisation members should be aware of SR and understand the importance of SR in dealing with detrimental issues in the workplace, e.g., WA. Third, organisations should create a democratic setting in which organisation members feel committed and empowered by including them in decision-making processes.

# ***Limitations and Future Directions***

There are several limitations to this study. First, since LMX, self-regulation, and work alienation variables of employees' and middle managers' subjective feelings, all scales were rated by themselves. We have to consider that the use of self-reports for all variables may lead to the common method and social desirability biases. Second, it is challenging to accurately determine a causal relationship using cross-sectional data. Therefore, we suggest future research should adopt a longitudinal approach to gain more convincing causal relationship results. Third, the fieldwork was carried out in cosmopolitan cities in the eastern part of Turkey, and it is difficult to generalise the results to the entire population of Turkey, which appears to be a weakness of this study. Another limitation might be the unequal participation from sectors. There were 205 participants out of 310 from the public sector, while there were 105 participants from the private sector. Even if the sample size was sufficiently large for the study, more participants would be needed to generalise the results by sector.

Future research may explore the concepts that might affect WA, such as the effects of authentic leadership, positive psychological capital, and organisational support. Since we studied LMX with one source, further research may consider examining LMX in a dyadic manner. This study lays the groundwork for future research by using self-efficacy and self-esteem as mediators when dealing with toxic work environment issues. Moreover, self-organisation as a variable can be explored for further studies by applying socio-economic theories, e.g., Kahneman's Prospect Theory and Thaler's Nudging Theory. Future studies might conduct research by comparing results from the Turkish context to developed countries.

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Appendix 1. Final PLS model



Appendix 2. Slope matrix



Appendix 3. MICOM process results

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Constructs | Configural invariance | Compositional invariance assessment | Full measurement model invariance assessment |
| Original Correlation | 0.05 | Compositional invariance | Mean Difference | Confidence Interval | Equal mean values? | Variance Difference | Confidence Interval | Equal variances? | Full measurement invariance |
| Age | Established | 1.000 | 1.000 | Established | 0.519 | [-0.192, 0.191] | No | -0.181 | [-0.361, 0.377] | Yes | Not Established |
| Gender | Established | 1.000 | 1.000 | Established | -0.236 | [-0.206, 0.207] | No | 0.128 | [-0.079, 0.109] | No | Not Established |
| LMX | Established | 0.999 | 0.995 | Established | -0.418 | [-0.210, 0.197] | No | 0.219 | [-0.239, 0.240] | Yes | Not Established |
| LMX\*Tenure | Established | 1.000 | 1.000 | Established | -0.023 | [-0.199, 0.211] | Yes | 0.468 | [-0.751, 0.919] | Yes | Established |
| Self-Regulation | Established | 0.993 | 0.992 | Established | -0.351 | [-0.197, 0.204] | No | -0.085 | [-0.286, 0.295] | Yes | Not Established |
| Tenure | Established | 1.000 | 1.000 | Established | 0.288 | [-0.208, 0.178] | No | 0.496 | [-0.773, 0.869] | Yes | Not Established |
| Work Alienation | Established | 1.000 | 0.996 | Established | 0.055 | [-0.202, 0.202] | Yes | -0.192 | [-0.275, 0.304] | Yes | Established |

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