



# The role of leader emotion management in leader–member exchange and follower outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

In response to growing calls for such research, we develop and test a model of leader behaviors directed at managing followers' negative emotions. These leader interpersonal emotion management strategies (IEMS) are posited to affect followers' organizational citizenship behaviors performed within interpersonal relationships (OCBs) and job satisfaction via follower perceptions of the quality of the leader–member exchange relationship (LMX). In addition, we posit that some, but not all, leader IEMS promote and strengthen LMX relationships. Results from multisource data in a sample of 163 leader–follower dyads confirmed the majority of the hypothesized direct effects of the leader IEMS and mediating effects of LMX.

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## Introduction

Emotions are intricately intertwined in theories of leadership and lie at the core of many leadership mechanisms such as inspiring followers, building and sustaining interpersonal relationships, and investing in follower outcomes such as satisfaction, performance and citizenship behaviors (e.g., Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Connelly, Gaddis, & Helton-Fauth, 2002; Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Humphrey, 2008; Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008; Rajah, Song, & Arvey, 2011). Indeed, many scholars have acknowledged that leaders are active managers of group emotion (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Brotheridge & Lee, 2008; George, 2000; Humphrey, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2008; Pescosolido, 2002; Pirola-Merlo, Härtel, Mann, & Hirst, 2002).

Given the vast number of studies, debates and comprehensive reviews that have accumulated (e.g., Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009; Ashkanasy, 2003; Gooty et al., 2010; Humphrey, 2008; Rajah et al., 2011), the study of leadership and emotions is no longer considered an emerging domain. Many of these accumulated empirical studies have shed light on issues such as how leader's own positive and negative emotional displays affect followers (i.e., Brotheridge & Lee, 2008), the impact of contagion processes that transmit leader affect to the workgroup (e.g., Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005), and the effects of leader surface and deep acting on follower outcomes to name just a few (i.e., Humphrey et al., 2008). The role of emotions in leadership literature, then, has primarily focused on leaders' emotional displays, processes (e.g., contagion, emotional labor) and emotion-related abilities (e.g., emotional intelligence; positive and negative affectivity) and the effects thereof on their followers, or groups of followers. What is less common in the literature is a focus on the *active* or *conscious behaviors* enacted by leaders to manage follower emotions. Such a focus would be consistent with the work of many scholars who have argued convincingly that followers and leaders alike consider the management of follower emotion, and negative emotion in

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particular, a fundamental leadership task (e.g., Ashkanasy, 2003; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Humphrey, 2008; Huy, 2002; Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009; Pescosolido, 2002; Seo et al., 2012; Toegel, Kilduff, & Anand, 2013). Indeed, Humphrey (2008) coined the term “leading with emotional labor” to reflect this critical function of a leader as an active manager of follower emotion. Yet, rather surprisingly, the literature is fairly scant in this domain with very few studies focusing on specific behaviors leaders enact in response to follower emotion (e.g., Gooty et al., 2010).

To be sure, a handful of studies have examined leader behaviors as the cause of follower emotions. For example, Dasborough (2006) found that certain leader behaviors (e.g., empowering followers, communication, demonstrating concern, recognizing employee effort) are the causes of affective events in followers thus leading to emotion experiences. Similarly, McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) found that followers experience more positive emotions when leaders display transformational behaviors. In an earlier theoretical treatise, Weierter (1997) argued that charismatic leaders reinforce follower self-esteem via displays of enthusiasm and passion and thus engender positive emotions in followers. Despite this progress, less is known about what specific behaviors leaders enact to manage followers' negative emotions. And, importantly, what is the influence of these behaviors on important job-related outcomes such as relationship quality, contextual performance and satisfaction?

In this paper, we cast interpersonal emotion management (IEM) strategies (Williams, 2007) as observable leader behaviors targeted at managing followers' negative emotions. Drawing upon increasing evidence in emotion regulation theories and empirical findings which suggest that people routinely manage and regulate others' emotions (e.g., Barden, Zelko, Duncan, & Masters, 1980; Covell & Abramovitch, 1987; Francis, 1997; Huy, 2002; McCoy & Masters, 1985; Niven, Holman, & Totterdell, 2012; Niven, Totterdell, Holman, & Headley, 2012; Pierce, 1995; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990; Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2003; Toegel, Anand, & Kilduff, 2007; Williams, 2007; Williams & Emich, 2014), we suggest that leaders regulate follower emotions via the use of leader IEM strategies. Furthermore, drawing upon the tenets of social exchange theory and attribution theory we argue that followers attribute differing intentionality to the use of these strategies, which in turn will influence relationship quality.

Specifically, a leader's use of problem-focused strategies that mitigate or eliminate underlying causes of negative emotions will relate to positive follower perceptions of a quality exchange relationship between the follower and leader (i.e., LMX). In contrast, a leader's use of IEM strategies that are emotion-focused and leave the underlying cause of negative emotion unaddressed hinder the LMX relationship via decreased rapport and affiliation (e.g., Butler et al., 2003). We further expect that LMX will mediate the relationships between each of the IEM strategies and routinely studied work outcomes: organizational citizenship behaviors performed within interpersonal work relationships (OCBIs) and job satisfaction. We chose these outcomes because of their conceptual relationships with LMX and their organizational importance, as both have been linked to organizational performance (e.g., Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002; Ostroff, 1992).

Our work contributes to the leadership and emotions literature in three unique ways. First, we extend research on emotions in leadership by investigating perceptions of specific leader behavior targeted at managing followers' negative emotions. The LMX literature has long contended that leader-follower interactions and role-making episodes can elicit high-quality LMX (e.g., Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997; Sin, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2009). Yet, we know very little about the specific leader behaviors that are enacted during such role-making episodes or interactions that relate to LMX. An understanding of such behaviors could stimulate further theory and empirical research by pinpointing specific leader behaviors (in addition to known LMX antecedents such as dyad tenure) that could foster higher quality LMX.

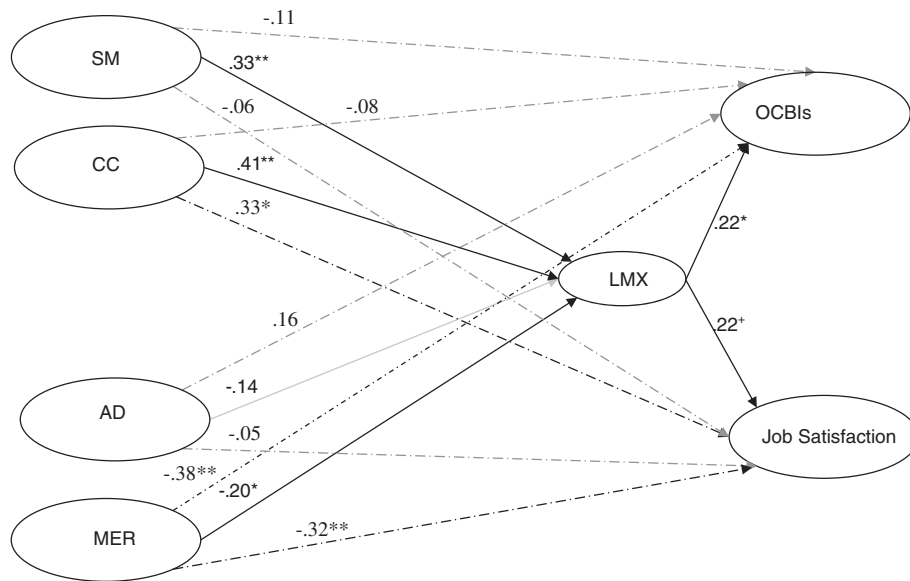
Second, we contribute to theory and findings in the study of social exchanges which have started to move away from a purely transactional-cognitive route to one that contends that emotion expression and regulation are key building blocks for the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010; Butler et al., 2003; Gooty, Thomas, & Connelly, 2015; Harker & Keltner, 2001; Lawler & Thye, 1999; Saavedra & Van Dyne, 1999). Considering that leaders' responsiveness to followers' emotions in interpersonal relationships is laden with information, attributions and intentionality, a focus on such emotional phenomena may be central to understanding social exchange (e.g., Butler et al., 2003; Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2009).

Finally, we contribute to the IEM literature by offering a finer grained examination of IEM strategies. This examination suggests that specific IEM strategies differentially affect the quality of leader-follower relationships. Understanding why perceptions of some IEM strategies are likely to elicit positive outcomes whereas some are likely to elicit negative outcomes deepens our theoretical understanding of IEM strategies in organizations beyond current models, which suggest primarily positive effects for the target individual (Williams & Emich, 2014). In the following sections, we develop theory connecting the use of leader IEM strategies to evaluations of the social exchange relationships between leaders and their followers, OCBIs, and job satisfaction. Next, we present empirical findings showing the importance of IEM strategies in building or thwarting high-quality LMX. Such LMX, in turn, mediates the association between leader IEM strategies and work outcomes: OCBIs and job satisfaction (see Fig. 1 for a graphical description).

### *Interpersonal Emotion Management Strategies*

Interpersonal emotion management (IEM) strategies derive from Gross (1998) work on emotion management of the self and the notion that individuals manage others' emotions at work using the same tactics that they use to manage their own emotions (Francis, 1997; Little, Klueemper, Nelson, & Gooty, 2012; Lively, 2000; Niven, Totterdell, & Holman, 2009). Williams (2007) outlined four interpersonal emotion management strategies used to manage others' emotions: situation modification, cognitive change, attentional deployment, and modulating the emotional response.

*Situation modification* consists of active efforts to directly modify or change a situation to alter its emotional impact (Gross, 1998). In situation modification, a leader will remove, modify, or change the aspects of the situation or problem causing an undesired emotion in the follower. As such, situation modification is problem-focused. For example, if an employee is experiencing anxiety



**Fig. 1.** Path estimates additional paths tested in alternative model SM = situation modification, AD = attentional deployment, CC = cognitive change, MER = modulating the emotional response. LMX = leader–member social exchange; +  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

over completing work within a specified time frame, a supervisor might modify the situation by reducing the amount of work required for the task or by reassigning some of the employee's responsibilities to a coworker.

*Cognitive change* involves selecting which of many possible meanings will be attached to the situation, reappraising or reinterpreting the situation as having less potential for harm to goals, concerns, and well-being (Gross, 1998). Cognitive change entails the leader exhibiting behaviors that put situations in perspective for the follower, helping the follower see the situation in a more positive light. Thus, cognitive change is also problem-focused. For instance, if an employee were distressed that her R&D project did not receive funding, her manager might reframe the failure as a normal and important step toward developing a project that would get funding. Cognitive change is distinguished from situation modification in that the antecedent causing the undesired emotion is not removed or altered. Instead, the negative emotional impact of the antecedent is mitigated by changing the way the follower thinks about the problem. When using this strategy, a leader is attempting to reduce emotion-provoking aspects of the situation in the mind of the follower.

We acknowledge that when cognitive change is self-focused rather than interpersonally oriented, it is similar in content to the coping strategy known as positive reinterpretation (i.e., seeing a stressor in a more positive light and as a challenge rather than a threat; Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Although positive reinterpretation has been cast as an emotion-focused coping strategy by some scholars (e.g., Carver et al., 1989) and alternatively, as a problem-focused strategy by others (Wright, Mohr, Sinclair, & Yang, 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), we follow the latter as we contend that in order to reinterpret a problem in a more positive light for others, one must understand and focus on the problem.

*Attentional deployment* involves distracting attention away from the elements of a situation that are harmful to goals, concerns, or well-being, or by moving away from the situation entirely (Gross, 1998). In attentional deployment, a leader directs his or her behavior at distracting the follower in order to induce more positive emotions. Leaders and other agents will often use humor (e.g., acting silly to make the target laugh) or other means (e.g., denigrating a common enemy) as ways of distracting followers to improve their emotions (Niven et al., 2009). Attentional deployment is distinguished from situation modification and cognitive change in that the problem causing the undesired emotion is not removed, reframed, or directly addressed. Instead, when using this strategy, a leader is attempting to distract a follower's attention from the cause of the negative emotion. In this way, attentional deployment is emotion-focused.

*Modulating the emotional response* involves influencing emotional response tendencies. This strategy is aimed at reducing the behavioral expression of an emotion once it is experienced. In modulating the emotional response, leaders engage in behaviors that encourage followers to suppress their undesired negative emotions. Suppression can be particularly important in organizations because it can be easily communicated and modeled by leaders and also built into an organization's culture (Hochschild, 1979; Huy, 2002; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). Indeed, organizational display rules are typically targeted at the suppression of negative emotions such as anger, shame, and sadness (Geddes & Callister, 2007), and leaders encourage adherence to these display rules via acts of modulating the emotional response. For example, a leader may direct an employee to calm down when upset, or advise him or her to "relax," or tell him or her "that's enough." Leaders' attempts at managing followers' emotions often involve "making it clear [one] do[es] not care how the target feels," and aims to reduce the follower's expression of these feelings rather than to address the problem causing the feelings (Niven et al., 2009, p. 504). Thus, modulating the emotional response, like attentional deployment is emotion-focused.

Importantly, IEM strategies are focused on the management of others' negative emotions. Negative emotions arise out of a perceived goal obstruction or threat in one's environment (see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). The IEM strategies that we have described above differ in the extent to which they address the sources of followers' negative emotions. We contend that when IEM strategies are visible and perceived by followers, not all IEM strategies will create conditions that are optimal for relationship development and will have implications for leader-follower relationships.

### *Leader–Member Exchange and Interpersonal Emotion Management*

Leader–member exchange, with its roots in social exchange theory, suggests that leader-follower interactions lay the foundation for perceptions of the quality of the exchange relationship between leaders and followers (Blau, 1964). Followers' perceptions of LMX reflect the expectation that voluntary actions on their part will be reciprocated by the leader (e.g., Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles, & Walker, 2007). These perceptions are important in the workplace because they influence performance-related and attitudinal variables (see Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; and Gerstner & Day, 1997, for reviews). The history of followers' interactions with their leaders shapes their perceptions of the nature and quality of those relationships. Such relationships develop over a period of time (e.g., Bauer & Green, 1996) and are based on role-making episodes (e.g., Sin et al., 2009). This history results in leaders developing different types of relationships with their various followers (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975). Relationships with one's leader can reside anywhere on a continuum from a low-quality transactional relationship based on quid pro quo exchanges to a high-quality exchange relationship based on felt obligation and reciprocal behavior. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) note that higher quality exchanges are a function of met expectations resulting from such role-making episodes, and these expectations span both the task and interpersonal domains.

The social exchange view of LMX argues that the development and maintenance of positive LMX relationships occur via high-quality interpersonal exchanges characterized by respect, liking, and mutual obligation (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Even though such interpersonal exchanges are ripe with emotions and emotion-related information, theory and research in LMX have adopted a largely cognitive-transactional stance with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Ballinger & Rockmann, 2010; Saavedra & Van Dyne, 1999). Furthermore, early works in LMX (e.g., Dienesch & Liden, 1986) have underscored the importance of member attributions and categorizations of leader behavior in forming LMX evaluations. Considering that the experience, expression, and partner's responsiveness to emotions in interpersonal relationships is laden with information, attributions and intentionality, a focus on such emotion phenomena is key to understanding how such high quality LMX relationships could be fostered (e.g., Butler et al., 2003). When leaders actively manage followers' emotions via IEM strategies, such leader behaviors become an integral piece of information that followers draw upon in further evaluating, reciprocating, and maintaining that relationship with their leaders.

In this section, we propose that the use of leader IEMs that are problem-focused will be positively associated with LMX while, their use of emotion-focused IEMs will be negatively associated with LMX. For example, a leader might use situation modification by assigning additional supportive resources (e.g., coworkers, extra pay) to a subordinate who is feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Such a leader has clearly addressed the cause of the anxiety and attempted to alleviate it. Thus, we contend that situation modification will be positively related to LMX.

Cognitive change also addresses the cause of the negative emotion, but does so in a somewhat different manner. When using cognitive change, the leader attempts to alter the follower's perception of the causes of the negative emotions (rather than altering the causes themselves). For instance, when a leader helps the follower see the cause of the negative emotion in a different light as something that is temporary and will improve with each day, not only is the emotional impact of the situation reduced, but the follower is likely to appreciate the leader's attempt to reframe the situation. The leader has increased the follower's perceptions of the quality of their LMX and sense of obligation toward the leader. When followers then make positive attributions about the leader (e.g., "s/he cares about my goals"), and they feel a sense of obligation based on met expectations (i.e., "my leader just dealt with threats in my work environment as I expected them to"), then a sense of obligation is created via the supportive leader behavior of reframing the workplace hassle.

There are at least three compelling pathways from follower perceptions of leader problem-focused IEMs use and LMX. First, followers have role expectations regarding leader IEM (e.g., Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Toegel et al., 2013). Both positive and negative emotions stem from daily workplace events (Dasborough, 2006; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). A key function of leadership is to attend to or work toward alleviating workplace hassles (i.e., be problem-focused), thus mitigating follower negative emotions (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Humphrey, 2008). When leaders use IEM strategies that address the problems causing negative emotions (situation modification or cognitive change), followers' expectations are met, a sense of obligation is created, and LMX is enhanced.

A second pathway from leader IEMs to LMX is attributions of intentionality on the part of followers when they perceive leaders using problem-focused coping strategies (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2005). Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2005) state people act as "naïve scientists" in deciphering, making sense of and attributing intentions to other people's behavior (see also Martinko & Gardner, 1987 for a review of leader–member attribution processes). They further note that followers could attribute leader behavior to a focus that is other-oriented or self-serving. We extend their logic further and suggest that followers attribute benevolent intentionality to the leader (i.e., my leader cares about me and is watching out for me) when they perceive the use of problem-focused IEM strategies. As noted earlier, this is due to the alleviation of work-related hassles that form the core of such leader IEMs.

Third, when leaders use problem-focused IEMs, they communicate to followers that the expression of negative emotions is acceptable. Moreover, because emotions are rich with communicative information (Alea & Bluck, 2007), the expression of emotions can enhance communication, promote positive relational functioning (Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Gross & John, 2003) and bring

needed attention to important organizational issues (Geddes & Callister, 2007). Using problem-focused IEMs, they not only address the source of the followers' emotion, but also may make followers feel validated and promote open communication of followers' thoughts as well as emotions—which could set the stage for the relationship to be better (e.g., Gross & Levenson, 1997). Taken together, each of these cognitive mechanisms—i.e., met role expectations of the leader, an attribution of benevolence and emotion rich communication in the relationship—all allow higher quality LMX relationships to emerge.

**Hypothesis 1.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of situation modification will positively impact LMX.

**Hypothesis 2.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of cognitive change will positively impact LMX.

However, not all IEM strategies used by leaders produce positive outcomes. When leaders use IEM strategies that do not address the cause of negative emotions (i.e., are not problem-focused), followers' role expectations regarding the leader go unmet. Their LMX is undermined, and they are less likely both to invest in voluntary actions for that leader and to believe that their voluntary actions might be reciprocated. We argue that attentional deployment and the modulating the emotional response are likely to negatively impact LMX in the context of leader-follower relationships because they do not alleviate sources of negative emotion in the environment. Attentional deployment signals to followers that leaders are not willing to invest time and resources in altering the source of the negative emotion (materially or cognitively). Thus, followers will be less likely to engage in reciprocal behavior. Furthermore, when followers observe that leaders do not attempt to address or alleviate workplace challenges in their environment, one of followers' fundamental role expectations of leaders is violated (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

The awareness that those who should be able to address a workplace problem are instead trying to distract from that problem can cause resentment over time. For example, consider a follower who has had an intense negative experience with a customer (or coworker) and feels angry. The leader might steer the conversation to focus on things that the follower enjoys. Such responses to follower emotions might distract the follower momentarily. However, because the causes in the follower's environment are not mitigated or resolved, the follower might infer that the leader does not care enough to invest time and resources in alleviating the causes of his or her negative emotions. The follower will subsequently feel that his or her problem is being overlooked or ignored. This unmet expectation affects the follower's evaluation of the quality of the exchange relationship with the leader. Furthermore, the follower could then attribute apathy and less benevolent intentionality to the leader as they have not observed behaviors directed at alleviating the follower's workplace hassles. We hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 3.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of attentional deployment will negatively relate to LMX.

Similarly, because modulating the emotional response (MER) involves suggesting that a target (i.e., follower) refrain from expressing his or her negative feelings, this mode of behavior shows disregard for those feelings and does not address the source of the negative emotions. The use of MER not only conveys to followers that their emotions need to be suppressed, but also that the leader does not acknowledge their feelings as valid and is not going to work to alleviate them. In interpersonal relationships research, especially marital satisfaction research, a key cause for relationships to deteriorate is the suppression of emotion as they tend to be so rich with communicative information (Alea & Bluck, 2007). As an example, Gottman and Levenson (2000) in a 14-year longitudinal study of married heterosexual couples found that emotions in interactions between the couple predicted divorce rates at a later time with 93% accuracy. Our point here is that when leaders encourage follower to suppress their emotions, they lose the opportunity to address the problem, make followers feel validated, and to promote open communication of followers' thoughts as well as emotions—behavior which could have set the stage for the relationship to be better (e.g., Gross & Levenson, 1997). Instead, the use of MER is likely to decrease interpersonal expressiveness and relationship quality (Gross & John, 2003). Indeed, as noted earlier, the suppression of emotion expression in that dyadic relationship can be toxic to the relationship as it hinders free and fair communication (e.g., Butler et al., 2003).

Whether or not followers choose to suppress their emotions, leaders who ask their followers to refrain from expressing their feelings discount their followers' experiences. They also fail to resolve the emotion-eliciting event. Followers may view leaders as apathetic regarding their situations (e.g., Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002, 2005). Thus, unmet role expectations for the leader, an attribution of apathy rather than benevolence, and emotion-poor communication in the relationship—all may inhibit higher quality LMX relationships from emerging. We propose the following:

**Hypothesis 4.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of modulating the emotional response will negatively relate to LMX.

#### *IEM strategies, LMX, Satisfaction and OCBs*

Overall job satisfaction, which refers to the degree to which an employee enjoys a job, is not only a central job attitude and outcome variable in organizational behavior (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001), but also a relevant outcome for LMX because leaders directly influence subordinates' experiences of their jobs (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Organizational citizenship behaviors, which refer to discretionary behaviors that promote effective functioning of the organization but are not typically recognized formally by an organization (Lee & Allen, 2002; Organ, 1988), are also relevant to the leader-subordinate context. High-quality LMX is associated with felt obligation (e.g., "I owe him or her one"), and OCBs are a core mechanism for expressing both felt obligation and the reciprocity that often accompanies high-quality LMX relationships (Dulebohn et al., 2012). We focus specifically on interpersonal or altruistic organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) because these are directed at helping another individual and, therefore, are particularly relevant for the exchange relationships between supervisors and subordinates (Williams & Anderson, 1991).

Given this study's purpose of identifying important work outcomes associated with IEM strategies, we position LMX as the explanatory mechanism relating the perception of IEM strategies to job satisfaction and OCBIs. Because the relationship between LMX and satisfaction and OCBIs has been established in the extant literature (c.f. Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Ozer, 2008; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997), we will present theoretical support and hypotheses linking IEM strategies to these outcomes indirectly via LMX.

We have proposed that, although all IEM strategies may reduce negative emotions at least temporarily in specific contexts, only some strategies provide positive cues about leaders' willingness to address emotion-provoking threats to their followers' well-being, whereas other strategies provide negative cues about leaders' willingness to do this. Specifically, because followers' role expectations regarding leaders' willingness to address threats to them are met via the problem-focused strategies of situation modification and cognitive change, these behaviors signal to followers that the leaders care about them. When followers perceive these behaviors, they are likely to experience a sense of obligation and higher quality LMX will ensue. This higher quality LMX as well as the sense of indebtedness and obligation characteristic of high-quality LMX set the stage for extra effort to engage in extra-role behavior. Having a leader who acknowledges and addresses obstacles in one's workplace via enactment of cognitive change and situation modification creates positive outcomes because (a) it provides a positive interpersonal cue as to the quality of the leader-follower relationship, (b) it motivates followers to put in extra effort toward their tasks as they feel indebted to the supervisor, and (c) the resultant perception of higher quality LMX acts as a critical supportive resource for followers in that it enhances their belief that they can rely on their leaders to overcome obstacles, thus encouraging OCBIs.

Higher quality LMX also facilitates job satisfaction for similar reasons. First, the supervisor and the work environment are both critical aspects of job satisfaction. When higher quality LMX relationships exist, job satisfaction should increase because followers enjoy the material and relational benefits of that quality relationship (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Ozer, 2008). Finally, follower job satisfaction is also enhanced because high quality LMX signals to followers that their leader values their role and contribution and is willing to invest time and resources into that relationship. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 5.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of situation modification (5a) and cognitive change (5b) will be positively and indirectly related to OCBIs through LMX.

**Hypothesis 6.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of situation modification (6a) and cognitive change (6b) will be positively and indirectly related to job satisfaction through LMX.

In contrast to the effects of IEM strategies that address the underlying causes of negative emotions, attentional deployment and modulating the emotional response are negatively related to LMX because (a) they do not address the underlying causes of followers' negative emotions and, thus, provide negative interpersonal cues about the quality of the leader-follower relationship, (b) they result in unmet role expectations on the part of the follower, and (c) they leave in place obstacles or hassles in the work environment.

**Hypothesis 7.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of attentional deployment (7a) and modulating the emotional response (7b) will be negatively and indirectly related to OCBIs through LMX.

**Hypothesis 8.** Followers' perceptions of leaders' use of attentional deployment (8a) and modulating the emotional response (8b) will be negatively and indirectly related to job satisfaction through LMX.

## Methods

### *Participants & Procedure*

The participants in this study were recruited by undergraduate students from a large university in the southeastern United States. The students were asked to recruit one employee and his or her supervisor to fill out online surveys, a strategy known as the snowball technique which has been used in previous studies (c.f. Gosserand & Diefendroff, 2005; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002; Tepper, 1995). This technique allowed us to sample a wide range of occupations, which facilitates generalizability of the results (Gosserand & Diefendroff, 2005; Tepper, 1995). The students received extra credit in undergraduate management classes in return for recruiting individuals to participate in the study. Once students recruited participants, they were instructed to provide company names, telephone numbers, and email addresses for each of the employees and their supervisors to the researchers. Students were told that the researchers would contact select individuals to validate their employment and willingness to participate in the study. The researchers emailed two surveys to each participant two weeks apart in order to minimize method bias. The supervisors were sent a link to their surveys after the employees received theirs. Employees completed an online survey measuring the IEM strategies of their leaders (Survey 1, Time 1), their perceptions of LMX (Survey 2, Time 2), and their job satisfaction (Survey 2, Time 2). The supervisors completed an online survey assessing follower OCBIs.

Two hundred and fifty-six employees completed Survey 1 and of those, 234 employees completed Survey 2. One hundred and ninety-nine (199) of those employees' supervisors completed surveys. With listwise deletion of missing data, the final sample consisted of 163 matched dyads. Forty-six percent of the employee participants were male, and the average age was 30.0 ( $SD = 13.69$ ). The average tenure in the current job was 4.06 years ( $SD = 5.82$ ) and the average tenure with their supervisor was 2.66 years ( $SD = 3.70$ ). Thirty-three percent of the sample indicated their primary job type was in "maintenance, service or sales,"

13% indicated “clerical,” 10% indicated “technical,” 17% indicated “administrative,” 6% indicated “education,” and 22% indicated “other.” Forty-eight percent of the supervisor participants were male, the average age was 38.3 (SD = 12.5), and the average tenure as a supervisor was 8.97 years (SD = 8.62).

## Measures

### *IEM strategies*

In this study, consistent with work on emotion management in self, we investigate IEM strategies as general tendencies (i.e., Gross, 1998). IEM strategies, similar to other organizationally-relevant constructs (e.g., regulatory focus, Johnson, Shull, & Wallace, 2011), can be measured at different levels such as event-specific, person-specific, and general style. In the current study, we investigate IEM as a general tendency because we are interested in the impact that perceptions of consistent use of these strategies can have on LMX. Additionally, according to a study assessing the consistency of strategies across multiple events using behavioral ratings (average ICC = 0.50, Little, Klumper, Nelson, & Ward, 2013), IEM strategies are somewhat stable within agents. Thus, IEM strategies were measured using a slightly modified version of the IEM strategies scale (Little et al., 2012), which includes four 5-item subsets measuring each of the IEM strategies measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Using this scale, the IEM strategies have been shown to be theoretically and empirically distinct from other measures including (a) constructs representing the agent's ability to manage emotion, such as emotional intelligence (EI), (b) *self-focused* regulatory processes, such as emotional labor, (c) emotion regulation of self, and (d) pervasive personality characteristics, like the ability to take perspective and feel empathy (Little et al., 2012). IEM strategies represent specific behaviors directed at managing others' emotions.

In the current study, the scale was modified based on referent (i.e., changed to focus on supervisor behavior rather than rater behavior). Employees were asked the degree to which their supervisors engaged in a specific behavior in relation to the employee's undesired negative emotions. Sample items include “My supervisor removes the negative aspects of situations that are negatively impacting me” for situation modification, “My supervisor distracts my attention from the aspects of problems causing undesired negative emotions in me” for attentional deployment, “When my supervisor wants me to feel less negative emotions (such as anger or sadness), s/he puts my problems into perspective” for cognitive change, and “My supervisor encourages me to keep my emotions to myself” for modulating the emotional response.

### *LMX*

The most widely used LMX measures (LMX 7; LMX-MDM) have elicited sharp criticism due to their origins in the vertical dyad linkage approach (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975). Current conceptualizations of LMX are rooted in social exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002) and the above noted measures of LMX are criticized for poorly representing the social exchange content on which LMX theory is built (e.g., Bernerth et al., 2007; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). In response to such concerns, Bernerth and colleagues developed a new social exchange-based measure of LMX, labeled LMSX. Evidence for convergent and divergent validity of the newly developed LMSX measure with current LMX scales (LMX 7, LMX-MDM), and incremental validity in predicting work outcomes (e.g., performance, commitment) over current scales can be found in Bernerth et al. (2007). We adopted the LMSX scale as our paper takes a social exchange view of LMX (Gooty & Yammarino, 2011, *in press* for such use). LMSX is an eight-item measure capturing the LMX relationship in the context of social exchange. Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale and sample items include “My manager and I have a two-way relationship” and “My relationship with my manager is composed of comparable exchanges of giving and taking.”

### *Organizational Citizenship Behavior*

OCBIs were measured using the 8-item scale from Lee and Allen's (2002) performance measure. Items were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale and included sample items “Gives up time to help others who have work or non-work problems” and “Assists others with their duties.”

### *Job Satisfaction*

Job satisfaction was measured using two items from the job satisfaction questions from the Job Diagnostics Scale. These questions assessed general satisfaction or the degree to which the employee is happy on the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale and included sample item “Generally speaking, I like working here.”

### *Control*

Previous research has found a positive relationship between dyad tenure and LMX (Wayne et al., 1997) as well as between tenure and job satisfaction (Bedeian, Ferris, & Kacmar, 1992). Also, because IEM strategies are used to manage negative emotions, dyad tenure may relate to actual use of these strategies which, of course should influence perceived use. Thus, we felt it important to control for dyad tenure in our study.

## Results

We provide bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics in Table 1. We followed the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) in that we first tested the fit of a measurement model and then tested the hypothesized model against a theoretically derived alternative model which included direct effects. The measurement model produced a good fit to the data (see Table 2). We additionally tested two alternative measurement models to support the proposed factor structure of the IEM strategies measure with the adjusted referent. In the first alternative model, we allowed the problem-focused strategies (situation modification and cognitive change) to load on a single factor and the two emotion-focused strategies (attentional deployment and modulating the emotional response) to load on a single factor. In the second alternative model, all four strategies were set to load on a single factor. Chi square difference test supported the four factor structure.

Although we believe the theoretical evidence outlined above supports LMX as the explanatory mechanism linking leader behavior to OCBI and job satisfaction, we cannot theoretically rule out the possibility that a significant direct effect with the dependent variables in the model. To investigate this possibility, we also tested one alternative structural model. As can be seen in Table 2, in Alternative Model 1, we allowed the direct effects of each of the IEM strategies to predict OCBI and job satisfaction. Chi square difference test supported retaining this alternative model.

In our final model, situation modification and cognitive change were positively related to leader–member social exchange, supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2, which stated that followers' perceptions of leaders' use of situation modification (H1) and cognitive change (H2) would positively impact LMX. Additionally, Hypothesis 4, which stated that followers' perceptions of leaders' use of modulating the emotional response of suppression would be negatively related to LMX was supported. We did not, however, find support for Hypothesis 3 as attentional deployment was not related to LMX. Tenure with one's supervisor was significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\gamma = .33, p < 0.05$ ) but not LMX or OCBI ( $\gamma = .33, ns; \gamma = .33, ns$ ).

We used bootstrap analyses, generating 1000 samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals to assess the significance of the indirect effects. We hypothesized that situation modification and cognitive change would be positively and indirectly related to OCBI and job satisfaction through LMX. We found that situation modification was indirectly related to OCBI and job satisfaction via LMX, supporting Hypotheses 5a and 6a (indirect unstandardized effect = .05,  $p < 0.05$ ; indirect unstandardized effect = 0.08,  $p < .05$  respectively). Cognitive change was indirectly related to OCBI and job satisfaction through LMX, thus offering support for Hypotheses 5b and 6b (indirect unstandardized effect = .09,  $p < 0.05$ ; indirect unstandardized effect = .14,  $p < 0.05$  respectively). We further hypothesized that attentional deployment and modulating the emotional response would be negatively and indirectly related to OCBI and job satisfaction, respectively, through LMX. However, attentional deployment was not indirectly related to OCBI or job satisfaction (indirect unstandardized effect =  $-.02, ns$ ; indirect unstandardized effect =  $-.03, ns$  respectively). Thus, Hypotheses 7a and 8a were not supported. Finally, for modulating the emotional response, Hypothesis 7a was supported while Hypothesis 7b was marginally supported in that modulating the emotional response was related to OCBI and job satisfaction indirectly through LMX (indirect unstandardized effect =  $-.02, p < 0.05$ ; indirect unstandardized effect =  $-.03, p < 0.10$  respectively). In our final model, we see, in addition to significant indirect effects, modulating the emotional response is directly and negatively associated with both OCBI and job satisfaction and cognitive change is directly and positively associated with job satisfaction.

## Discussion

An important aspect of leadership is managing negative emotions in followers, yet researchers have just begun to investigate the behavioral strategies that leaders use to do so. Further, even less is understood about the impact that perceptions of these strategies can have on leader–follower relationships or subsequent follower behavior and attitudes. The results of our study were consistent with a model in which followers' perceptions of LMX are influenced by their perceptions of the emotion management strategies used by their leader. Leaders' attempts to manage follower emotions can be positive as in the case of cognitive change and situation modification, negative as in the case of modulating the emotional response or neutral as in the case of attentional deployment.

Our findings are consistent with the premise that leaders' IEM strategies provide interpersonal cues that can engender stronger positive or negative perceptions about the nature and quality of the exchange relationships they share with their followers. Perceived efforts by leaders to attend to followers' needs and emotions, such as modifying the situation or reframing events, can provide such

**Table 1**

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and reliabilities.

| Variable                 | M    | SD   | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4            | 5       | 6       | 7      |
|--------------------------|------|------|---------|---------|---------|--------------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1 Situation modification | 5.14 | 1.18 | (0.91)  |         |         |              |         |         |        |
| 2 Cognitive change       | 4.75 | 1.04 | 0.44**  | (0.85)  |         |              |         |         |        |
| 3 Attentional deployment | 4.33 | 1.09 | 0.38**  | 0.59**  | (0.82)  |              |         |         |        |
| 4 MER                    | 2.89 | 1.40 | $-0.04$ | 0.15*   | 0.34**  | (0.91)       |         |         |        |
| 5 LMX                    | 3.80 | .64  | 0.45**  | 0.41**  | 0.20*   | $-0.16^*$    | (0.93)  |         |        |
| 6 OCBI                   | 4.02 | .73  | 0.06    | 0.02    | $-0.02$ | $-0.33^{**}$ | 0.23*   | (0.89)  |        |
| 7 Job satisfaction       | 5.99 | 1.06 | 0.20*   | 0.23**  | 0.08    | $-0.27^{**}$ | 0.33**  | 0.08    | (0.92) |
| 8 Tenure with supervisor | 4.06 | 5.82 | 0.02    | $-0.05$ | $-0.05$ | $-0.02$      | $-0.09$ | $-0.04$ | 0.12   |

Note. N = 163. MER = modulating the emotional response, LMX = leader–member social exchange, OCBI = Organizational Citizenship Behavior.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .



**Table 2**  
Results of structural nested model comparison.\*

| Model   | $\chi^2$  | df  | $\Delta\chi^2$ | RMSEA | SRMR | CFI |
|---|-----------|-----|----------------|-------|------|-----|
| Measurement model   | 1054.67** | 720 | –              | 0.053 | .065 | .92 |
| Alternative measurement model 1<br>Two problem-focused strategies (situation modification and cognitive change) load together and the two emotion-focused strategies (attentional deployment and modulating the emotional response) load together | 1607.37** | 731 | 552.7**        | 0.086 | .124 | .79 |
| Alternative measurement model 2<br>All four strategies load together on a single factor   | 2082.06** | 735 | 1027.39**      | 0.106 | .130 | .67 |
| Hypothesized model:<br>IEM strategies to LMX to OCIBs and job satisfaction; MER to OCIBs and job satisfaction   | 1087.14** | 725 | –              | 0.055 | .081 | .91 |
| Alternative model 1:<br>IEM strategies to LMX to OCIBs and job satisfaction; IEM strategies to OCIBs and job satisfaction   | 1049.02** | 717 | 38.12**        | 0.053 | .064 | .92 |

Note. N = 163. IEM = interpersonal emotion management, LMX = leader–member social exchange, OCIBs = interpersonal organizational citizenship behavior, MER = modulating the emotional response.

\* p < .05.

\*\* p < .01.

cues—perhaps via attribution of leader benevolence or met expectations—that are positively associated with LMX, OCIBs and job satisfaction. Across both of the problem-focused strategies, situation modification and cognitive change, leaders help followers alleviate and minimize goal-obstructive work events that serve as antecedents to undesired negative emotions. Our findings suggest that such leader behaviors help foster follower perceptions that leaders care about their goal accomplishment and are positively related to their evaluation of the quality of their relationships. Indirectly, they relate to follower outcomes—both behavioral and attitudinal. In addition, cognitive change was positively and directly associated with job satisfaction. Because positive moods have been found to be positively related to job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2001; Judge & Ilies, 2004), the IEM strategy of cognitive change may also influence job satisfaction by influencing followers' moods. To the degree that followers accurately perceive leaders general propensity to use cognitive change, such that this perception reflects an increase in positive affect during emotion managing interactions with the leader, the more generalized relationship that we found between this IEM strategy and follower job satisfaction may be mediated by positive mood.

Conversely, across both of the non-problem-focused strategies modulating the emotional response and attentional deployment, leaders fail to help followers alleviate and minimize goal-obstructive work events that serve as antecedents to undesired negative emotions. Our findings are consistent with our contention that leaders who encourage followers to modulate, or suppress, their emotional responses to negative events reap followers' negative views of the leader-follower relationship. Telling followers “that’s enough” or to “cut it out” may signal that leaders have no interest in helping followers manage negative events; they just don’t want followers to display negative reactions. This perception, in turn, is likely to relate to a less favorable evaluation of follower LMX with the leader. Moreover, the perceived demand for suppression may relate the desire to balance discretionary efforts against these additional demands for emotion work. When employees perceive that their leaders want them to suppress negative emotions, this lack of support can be compounded by the perceived demand for suppression. As a result of these perceived demands for suppression, the leader-follower exchange relationship suffers and OCIBs suffer as well.

It appears that modulating the emotional response may have an additional negative impact beyond that driven by LMX as it also significantly and negatively related to both job satisfaction and OCIBs. Because the act of suppressing one’s emotions may degrade one’s relationships and well-being (Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986)—a finding that has been replicated in studies of the emotional labor (Bhave & Glomb, 2013; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015)—modulating the emotional response may influence OCIBs through other mechanisms. In terms of job satisfaction, it appears that the physiological stress of suppressing emotions relates to job satisfaction, and the perceived demand to do so may directly generate dissatisfaction (Hochschild, 1983; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Further, withholding discretionary behaviors such as OCIBs is one way that employees correct for unfair or extra job demands (Organ, 1988, 1990).

Unexpectedly, we did not find a relationship between attentional deployment and leader–member exchange. We argued that when followers are adults who are aware that they are being distracted, they might deduce that the leader is uncaring or even underhanded regarding follower goals. Our null result suggests that attentional deployment may operate through more complex mechanisms. For instance, it may, at times, be perceived negatively as leader avoidance but at other times be viewed positively as well-intentioned attempts to alleviate the employee’s stress (even if the leader cannot address the environmental obstacle). It could also indicate, however, that this IEM strategy might not work as well in adult working populations as it does with children. Future research will need to investigate moderators that may help tease apart the possible positive and negative effects of leaders’ use of attentional deployment.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

Our study contributes to the leadership literature conceptually and empirically. Conceptually, we developed a model of specific and observable leader behaviors targeted at managing undesired negative emotions in the workplace. A vast body of literature

examines how leaders elicit positive emotions, but the management of undesired negative emotions is scarcely studied despite urgent need (Gooty et al., 2010). Empirically, our study provides initial evidence that leaders engage in discernible behaviors aimed at reducing or preventing negative emotional responses to events at work. This is an important contribution to the current literature.

The nature of this study has allowed us to make general statements about the potential predictive power of IEM strategies and their general use. Again, consistent with research on emotion regulation of self and much of the research on emotional labor (Gross & Levenson, 1993; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), the items used to measure leader IEM strategies captured whether followers perceive their leaders to be using these strategies in general. Our study of IEM strategies opens up a host of future research directions. We mention several examples below. Questions directly related to our results comprise our first three future directions. First, how do the frequency of use of each strategy and the relational context matter? From a follower's perspective, there might be a point at which continued use of a certain strategy would no longer affect relationship quality in the expected manner. Event-based studies of IEM strategies could shed light on the immediate impact of each strategy while considering the quality of the preexisting relationship between leaders and followers, individual differences in personal emotional management styles, and other factors as moderators. In addition, event-based studies may also reveal how preexisting affective ties influence perceptions of leaders' IEM strategies and may even moderate their effectiveness.

Secondly, does agreement matter? Specifically, are there effects of the agreement between follower ratings of leaders' IEM strategies and leaders' own ratings of the IEM strategies that they claim to utilize? Similarly, are there effects of the agreement between leaders' IEM strategies and the preferred self emotion-management strategy of followers? For example, the negative effect of leaders' use of emotion modulation may be mitigated when a follower's preferred self emotion-management strategy is suppression. Additionally, if leaders and followers hold systematically different perceptions of the leaders' IEM strategies, this could have important implications for both practice and theory. Thirdly, are there moderators that change the effectiveness of IEM strategies? For example, it is possible that the use of attentional deployment strategies could be positively related to LMX only when the follower is unaware that the leader is trying to distract him or her from the problem.

While the primary focus of this study was the impact of leader IEM strategies on followers, future research is needed to examine the potential personal consequences of these strategies for the leader (e.g., Niven et al., 2012). Future research could investigate whether different IEM strategies influence leaders' perceptions of LMX in the same directions that they influence followers' perceptions. For example, the same relationships may not hold for leader-rated LMX. Similar to the expression of compassion (Kanov et al., 2004), IEM strategies might be emotionally taxing on the leader and the resulting emotional exhaustion could be negatively related to outcomes and perceptions of LMX. On the other hand, these strategies might generate positive emotions such as pride and increased perceptions of LMX quality because the leader may perceive his or her own behavior as helpful and agentic. Moreover, organizational culture may moderate the effects of a leader's IEM strategies. For example, leaders' IEM strategies may generate more emotional exhaustion in a competitive conflict culture than in a culture of love (Gelfand, Leslie, & Keller, 2008; Barsade & O'Neill, 2014).

Future research should also investigate how leader IEM strategies and LMX affect such relevant constructs as counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWB), absenteeism, turnover intentions, and job performance of the followers, as well as performance ratings of the leader.

Based on the current study, we can make predictions concerning how these relationships will look, but future research can provide support for our understanding of the impact of relationship quality on a wide variety of relevant variables.

### *Limitations*

Our research is not without limitations. One of our limitations is that data were cross-sectional in nature. Causality, thus, cannot be inferred. We made theoretical arguments for the expected relationships and hypothesized directional association based on previous research and our findings were consistent with these expectations. Further, we strove to minimize method bias by including multi-source data collected at two points in time. Consistent with work on emotion regulation of self and emotional labor, we investigated the management of undesirable, negative emotion; however, future research should also investigate situations in which leaders try to manage followers' emotions to be less positive and more negative. For example, a manager may try to instill fear of dismissal or guilt in an employee so that he or she understands the importance of avoiding certain mistakes.

The use of the snowballing technique allowed us to gather matched dyadic data spanning multiple organizations. Yet, in its truest form, this technique yields data that could violate many assumptions in probability statistics (cf. Neuman, 2002). We acknowledge this as a limitation of our study as well.

### *Implications for Practice*

The findings of this study also hold several important implications for practice, should they be replicated. Perhaps most notably, it is important for leaders to understand that their followers are aware of the efforts being made to manage follower emotions. Because of the differential effects of the various IEM strategies, leaders must be aware that certain strategies are likely to be more effective than others in ultimately improving satisfaction and increasing OCBs. Managers in training could benefit from understanding the differences between strategies that demonstrate understanding and personal caring versus strategies that demonstrate a lack of these qualities. In addition, leaders must understand that they cannot merely rely on the strategies they use to manage their own emotions to regulate follower emotions. In managing one's own emotions, attentional deployment, or distracting oneself from the negative event, may prove useful. In contrast, distracting a follower from an emotion-eliciting event may be ineffective in terms of follower-enhancing perceptions of the quality of the relationship with the leader, OCBs, and satisfaction.

The results of our study can serve as an additional layer of support for emphasizing social exchange as the basis for leader-follower relationships within the organization. Instead of an exclusive focus on performance-based or task-based exchanges (e.g., a promotion given based on higher production outputs), leaders could be encouraged to help followers effectively resolve negative emotion-inducing events at work. Followers who perceive that leaders are “in tune” with their emotions may evaluate their relationships with their leaders more favorably, perform better, and exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction than those followers with weak relationships with leaders. Creating a perception that one genuinely is attempting to be helpful in managing emotions can be a powerful skill for leaders to obtain.

## Conclusion

Leadership and emotions have taken a center stage in the management literature. Yet, very little is known regarding the specific behavioral strategies used by leaders in managing follower negative emotions. Drawing upon emotion regulation and social exchange theories, we contended and found results consistent with our argument that when followers perceive that problem-focused leader emotion management meets expectations and creates future obligation, better LMX results. Conversely, when followers perceive that leaders use the non-problem-focused strategy of emotion modulating suppression, they reported lower LMX and job satisfaction, and their leaders reported lower OCBI. Our study suggests that the emotion management strategies impact the development of higher quality exchange relationships in the workplace and in follower OCBI.

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