HOW DOES EMPLOYEE DEVELOP HR ATTRIBUTION?: THE MODERATING ROLE OF LMX AND RLMX IN THE RELATIONSHIPS OF HR SYSTEM, HR ATTRIBUTION, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

How Does Employee Develop HR Attribution?: The Moderating Role of LMX and RLMX in the Relationships of HR System, HR Attribution, and its Consequences

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Drawing on the human resource (HR) attributions perspective, this study pursues advances in the arguments of the psychological process of human resource management. As it employs leader-member exchange (LMX) and social comparison theory, the study first identifies how LMX and relative LMX influence the development of HR attributions. Based on social exchange theory, justice theory, and motivation theory, this study puts forward two hypotheses. First, HR attribution of employee well-being increases employees’ organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) and performance while decreasing their turnover intention. Second, the HR attribution of employee exploitation decreases employees’ OCBs and performance while increasing their turnover intention. Further, this study suggests that the relationships between HR attributions and employee outcomes are contingent on relative LMX. Results from 499 employees across 53 groups of an organization showed that LMX and Relative LMX (RLMX) were important factors which were strongly related to HR attributions and employee outcomes. Both HR
attribution for employee well-being and exploitation had significant positive relationships
with OCBs, but only HR attribution for employee well-being influenced turnover
intention and performance. The interaction effects of relative LMX and HR attribution
were significant only when the type of HR attribution was well-being. This study
highlights the importance of LMX and RLMX in understanding the development and
roles of HR attributions in the HR process.

Keywords: human resource attributions; leader-member exchanges; relative leader-
member exchange; organizational citizenship behavior; performance; turnover intention
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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, the field of strategic human resource management (SHRM) has investigated the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices on diverse performance outcomes, such as financial performance (Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995; Takeuchi, Lepak, Wang, & Takeuchi, 2007), operational outcomes (Collins & Clark, 2003; Datta, Guthrie, & Wright, 2005; Zacharatos, Barling, & Iverson, 2005), and employee outcomes (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Takeuchi, Chen, & Lepak, 2009). Initial research (e.g., Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995) identified a set of HRM practices (i.e., HRM system) and its impact on organizational performance. Later, research furthered our systematic understanding of the contextual conditions under which these HRM systems perform better, as well as the mechanisms through which they influence the bottom lines of organizations (e.g., Chuang & Liao, 2010; Gardner, Moyhihan, Park, & Wright, 2001; Gong, Law, Chang, & Xin., 2009; Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009). The results offered by the existing literature advocate for management practitioners’ and scholars’ long belief that HRM practices contribute to the human capital that is crucial to an organization gaining a competitive advantage (Chang & Chen, 2011; Snell & Dean, 1992). A common theme in this line of research has been to focus on the performance-enhancing effects of HRM practices intended by organizations.

To elaborate the theory and research that delineate how HRM systems lead to organizational success, the SHRM field has begun attending to other facets underlying the HRM-performance relationships. A growing body of scholars (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Liao et al., 2009; Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Sanders, Shipton, & Gomes, 2014) wanting to explain how HRM practices operate have paid great attention to
multiple actors in an organization and their understanding of HRM practices. This is called a *process* perspective as it investigates the steps taken for HRM practices to be translated to employees’ performance. It covers various topics such as the variation in knowledge of HRM practices implemented in the organization across employees (e.g., McGovern, Hope-Hailey, & Stiles, 1997; Liao et al., 2009), the appropriate informant to rate the HRM practices of the organization (Gerhart, Wright, McMahan, & Snell, 2000), the consensus or discrepancy in intended, implemented, and experienced HRM practices, (e.g., Den Hartog, Boon, Verburg, & Croon, 2013; Khilji & Wang, 2007; Nishii & Wright, 2008), multiple actors who are involved in HRM operation mechanisms (i.e., HRM managers, line managers, and employees; e.g., Nishii & Wright, 2008; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012), employee perception of HRM practices and its effectiveness (e.g., Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Chang, 2005; Sanders, Dorenbosch, & de Reuver, 2008), and employee human resource (HR) attributions, which refers to employees’ understanding of the management intentions behind HRM practices (Nishii et al., 2008).

Among the various topics that the process perspective covers, SHRM scholars have increasingly focused on employees’ experience with HRM practices (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Sanders et al., 2014). Drawing on social cognition and signaling theory, and in line with human capital theory, those scholars assert that SHRM researchers need to turn their concerns away from HRM managers and concentrate on employees whose attitudes and behaviors are one of the most critical assets for organization financial success (i.e., human capital; Snell & Dean, 1992). According to them, HRM practices consistently send signals to employees to make them understand which attitudes and behaviors the organization expects of their employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).
Therefore, a key to an organization’s success would be not only designing HRM practices in accordance with the organization strategy, but also making employees experience and correctly understand the management’s purpose.

Ideally, employees understand management’s message as the message is intended. Also ideally, they want to develop the expected attitudes, behavior, and shared perceptions (i.e., climate or culture). Some scholars, however, such as Nishii and colleagues (2008), have questioned the link between HRM implementation and employees’ experience. They explained that employees actively collect, interpret, and understand information pertaining to the HRM practices intended by their organizations. These investigators have voiced their concerns that individual employees perceive HRM practices differently from not only what management intends but also from what employees perceive. For example, Nishii and colleagues (2008) noted that “… some employees perceive an HR practices as connoting an underlying quality HR strategy and others attribute the practice to a cost reduction HR strategy, regardless of the actual HR strategy pursued by management” (p. 510). This argument is supported by the conflicting findings in performance management and compensation literature, which showed that some employees perceived those HRM practices as a motivating factor (e.g., Spreitzer, 1995) while other employees regarded them as a tool for management to control employees’ productivity (e.g., Deckop, Mangel, & Cirka, 1999).

Despite such, little attention has been paid to why employees develop certain perceptions about HRM practices (Kim & Wright, 2011). HRM effectiveness is in large part determined by the degree to which employees’ perception of HRM is aligned with the purpose of HRM implementation. Considering this, it could be crucial, for a better
understanding of HRM operation mechanisms, to explore the factors—beyond the influence of HRM practices—that shape employees’ HRM perceptions. To the best of my knowledge though, no study has explored these factors.

The current study aims to address this research need and expand the current knowledge of employees’ HRM perceptions. By focusing on the differences in employees’ HRM experiences, the study explores the causes of distinct HRM perceptions among employees in an organization. Considering the influence of social context on people’s cognition, this study tests a social factor that could impact employees’ HRM perceptions. In line with scholars who emphasize the role of front-line managers in delivering HRM practices to their followers (Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Loose, 2013; Hales, 2005; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Jiang, et al., 2012), this study investigates how the work relationships between line managers and followers impact followers’ HRM attributions. Building on leader-member exchange (LMX), this study explores how the effects of HRM practices on employee attribution may be weakened or strengthened by the relationship between a line manager and a subordinate. Also, broadening the arguments of LMX and HRM attribution, this study investigates an employee’ comparison of his/her degree of LMX with others’ LMX perceptions. Building on social comparison theory, it examines how such a comparison affects an individual’s HRM attributions.

Further, to present evidence of the HRM practices operation mechanism, this study checks individual outcomes such as performance, turnover intention, and organizational citizenship behavior as the consequences of HRM attribution. This study aims to thereby show the full process of how HRM practices operate to shape employees’
HRM attribution, leading to certain employee behaviors desired by management. Drawing on the social exchange perspective, this study expects that HRM attribution for employee well-being is more strongly related to individual employees’ positive behavior and performance. Figure 1 depicts the theoretical framework of this study.

In doing so, this study aims to make several contributions to SHRM literature. First, it explores the social factors that may influence employees’ thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors. Since employees are embedded in social contexts at work, their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are influenced not solely by HRM practices. Those perceptions and behaviors are more likely the results from the compounding influence of HRM systems and social contexts (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). To date, however, the majority of studies have examined social contexts as the consequences of HRM influence (e.g., climates) rather than the underlying components that explain the compounding influences with HRM practices on individual and organization outcomes. As such, this study aims to explore the importance of social contexts in the operation of HRM practices. In particular, given the strong influence of leaders on employees’ perceptions (Greene, 1975; Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013), this study observes the work exchange relationships between leader and members (leader-member exchange: LMX). It sees such relationships as a social influence that could shape individual attributions of the HRM systems to which they are exposed. Also, by looking at group-level LMX dynamics and illustrating the detailed cross level influence of group-level LMX, this study aims to make more robust the theory of HRM process.
Another contribution of this study is that it describes the sequential influence of HRM practices operation on employee outcomes through employees’ cognition. Prior studies in the process approach have tested only parts of the process of HRM practices operation. These parts include revealing HRM attribution and its consequences (Nishii et al., 2008), the influences of HRM systems on employee attitude and behavior without employee cognitive response (e.g., Macky & Boxall, 2008; Takeuchi et al., 2009), and the impacts of HRM system on climates or employees’ shared responses (e.g., Hong, Liao, Hu, & Jiang, 2013; Li, Frenkel & Sanders, 2011; Sanders et al., 2008). However, without delineating the complete mediating process of employee cognition and perception in HRM operation, the real impact of HRM on employee outcomes remains unexplained. This study aims to contribute to the literature by unveiling the “black box” which explains the relationship between HRM practices and employees’ attitude and behavior, and expanding our knowledge of HRM process approach theoretically and empirically.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS AND HYPOTHESES

A Process Perspective in SHRM Research

An increasing number of SHRM scholars have acknowledged the way that employees experience HRM practices in the workplace as being a key aspect of investigating the process through which HRM practices influence business outcomes at the organization level (Jiang et al., 2012). Extending a multilevel perspective, researchers (Wright & Nishii, 2013) distinguished the process of managing human resources into intended, implemented, and perceived HRM practices. Intended HRM practices refer to an HRM system or practices designed and developed by the management of a company in the belief that it will result in desired employee responses (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Senior managers and/or HRM departments are typically involved in designing HRM practices at the organizational level (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Whereas, implemented HRM practices stand for the execution of intended HRM practices (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Line managers are a key implementer of HRM practices at the team or group level (Den Hartog et al., 2013), and thus their effectiveness of operating HRM practices determines the effectiveness of intended HRM practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Finally, at the individual level, employees perceive the HRM practices implemented by their managers (Nishii & Wright, 2008). The perceived HRM practices are what influence employee attitude and behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Hence, employees’ perceived HRM practices may be more important than managers’ perceived HRM practices in understanding the mechanism of HRM practice operation (Gerhart et al., 2000).

Given that the performance effects of intended and implemented HRM practices depend on how employees perceive these HRM practices (Nishii & Wright, 2008), previous process research has conceptualized employees’ perceptions of HRM practices...
in at least three ways. First, employees’ perceptions are regarded as the extent to which employees know intended or implemented HRM practices based on what they have experienced regarding these HRM practices (Aryee, Walumbwa, Seidu, & Otaye, 2012; Den Hartog et al., 2013; Jensen, Patel, & Messersmith, 2013; Liao et al., 2009). Employees decode the messages conveyed from the HRM practices they have experienced. They then come to know what organizations expect from them and how organizations manage them to fulfill performance expectations (i.e., the content of HRM practices). Perception-as-understanding approaches imply that accurate understanding of HRM practices ensures the alignment between intended or implemented HRM practices and perceived HRM practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

Second, employees’ perceptions are regarded as employee evaluations of their experienced HRM practices, which develops employees’ cognitive and attitudinal outcomes. In this vein, employees’ appraisals of HRM practices include employees’ understanding of the benefits they expect to receive from the HRM practices. If employees evaluate their HRM practices as being beneficial (e.g., increasing their well-being), this would give rise to their positive reactions (e.g., affective commitment) to the organization. If they perceive them as not beneficial (e.g., cost reduction), this would give rise to their negative reactions, such as the intention to leave the organization (Piening, Baluch, & Salge, 2013). The third way the literature has conceptualized employees’ perceptions of HRM practices is their attributions of why organizations adopt HRM practices. HRM practices signal the organization’s intentions toward employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). In the process of perceiving HRM practices, attributions for HRM practices reflect employees’ attempts to understand the organizational intentions. Based
on attribution theories and research (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Koys, 1988), Nishii and colleagues (2008) distinguished between positive and negative attributions. The former happens when employees see HRM practices as being intended to improve their contributions and well-being. The latter happens when employees see HRM practices as being intended to maximize management’s interest. Nishii and colleagues found that these attributions result in different employee attitudes.

Based on the assumption that intended HRM practices are well-aligned with organizational strategies and contexts (Den Hartog et al., 2013; Wright & Nishii, 2013), a stream of process research has focused on what makes employees perceive their experienced HRM practices in a way that generates the gaps among intended, implemented, and perceived HRM practices. These gaps are generally considered dysfunctional, because they increase the difficulty of eliciting strategically required attitudes and behaviors from employees as intended (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Earlier, McGovern and colleagues’ (1997) qualitative analysis revealed the gap between intended and implemented HRM practices by reporting the significant variation in implementing HRM practices across line managers in the same organization. In addition, subsequent quantitative investigations into the gap between implemented and perceived HRM practices have demonstrated that implemented HRM practices (i.e., managers’ perceived or rated HRM practices) have only modest (e.g., Aryee et al., 2012) or even non-significant (Liao et al., 2009) relationships with perceived HRM practices. Taking into account the theoretical claim and evidence for the multilevel gaps among intended, implemented, and perceived HRM practices, researchers have delved into the causes of
variance at different levels and paid attention to the factors of individual employees and social contexts.

In trying to explain the variance in implemented HRM practices, researchers have pointed to several factors including the characteristics of managers who implement intended HRM practices. On one hand, it has been conceived that implementers have different levels of effort (Wright & Nishii, 2007), willingness, and abilities to perform intended HRM practices (Den Hartog et al., 2013). On the other hand, researchers have argued that the variance in the perceived HRM practices hinges on differences in individual experiences and preferences (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Wright & Nishii, 2013; Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004) and the contextual factors that influence employee attitudes and behavior (Wright & Nishii, 2007). A body of empirical studies has thus far uncovered which aspects of managers influence employees’ perceived HRM practices while little evidence has been reported pertaining to the causes from individual employees. For example, Den Hartog and colleagues (2013) found that managers’ communication quality is positively related to the consistency between implemented and perceived HRM practices. Other studies have also reported positive relationships between line managers’ leadership behaviors for involvement and employees’ satisfaction with HRM practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), between the effectiveness, fairness, and integrity of line managers and employees’ positive perception on HRM practices (Alfes et al., 2013), and between line managers’ capacity to implement HRM practices and their HRM implementation effectiveness perceived by their subordinates (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013).
Among the multilevel gaps in the HRM process, this research primarily sheds light on perceived HRM practices. Specifically, employees’ attributions of HRM practices are investigated in relationship with experienced HRM practices. Ever since Nishii and colleagues (2008) first examined employee attribution in SHRM research, attribution has been regarded as one of the perceptual outcomes regarding intended or implemented HRM practices at the individual level. In the literature, however, it has not been widely examined. What have been particularly underdeveloped are the antecedents of employee attribution for HRM practices. One exception to this statement, though, is a work carried out by Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015). They indicated cross-level linkages between implemented high performance work system (HPWS) and HR well-being/performance attributions, which further relate to commitment and job strain at the individual level.

The current research is in line with this type of study and a previous research stream focusing on the role of managers as implementers of HRM practices. Indeed, this study examines how employees’ current experience with HRM practices affects their attributions of experienced HRM practices. It also inspects, using a social comparison perspective, how leader-member exchange alters this linkage (Festinger, 1954; Wood, 1989). In doing so, this study first theorizes the influence of the HRM system on HR attribution. To demonstrate this relationship more clearly, and in concert with the multiple HRM systems arguments (Lepak & Snell, 1995, 2002), it investigates the distinctive associations of different HRM systems with different HR attributions. Such a route builds on Lepak and Snell’s (1995, 2002) HR configuration theory and Nishii and colleagues’ (2008) HR attribution perspective. Then, this study elucidates the model of
HRM system process by illustrating a mediation role of HR attribution between an HRM system and employee outcomes. Next, it presents leader-member exchange relationships as the contextual influences and proposes that employees’ HR attribution generated by HRM system experience is altered by the leader-manager exchange relationship.

**HR Attributions and HRM System**

Nishii and colleagues’ (2008) work explored individuals’ perceptions of HRM, and it was here that the HR attribution perspective was first suggested. Building on the notions of attribution theories and strategic human resource management theories, they posited HR attributions. According to them, there would be four internal attributions of HRM practices (i.e., quality-enhancing strategy and employee well-being philosophy, cost reduction strategy, and exploiting employees philosophy) and one external attribution (i.e., union compliance). From the results of confirmatory factor analysis, they concluded that the four HR attributions could be grouped as two types—employee well-being and employee exploitation (for more detail, refer to page 520 of their paper). Testing the consequences of these employee perceptions of HR attribution, they found that if employees perceived the HRM was trying to enhance employee well-being, they were more likely to have higher affective commitment and satisfaction. If they perceived the HRM was trying to reduce costs and exploit employees, they were more likely to have lower affective commitment and satisfaction. Union compliance attribution failed to predict employee attitudes.

In the literature of HRM system research, certain relationships between HR attribution and HRM systems have been implied. The majority of HRM literature has examined and heavily suggested the impacts of HRM practices and systems on
employees’ attitude and behavior. For instance, researchers have presented numerous outcome variables that are influenced by either a single HRM practice or multiple ones. Such variables include employees’ organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, extra-role behavior, in-role behavior, counterproductive behavior, absenteeism, and/or turnover (Arthur, 1994; Batt, 2002; Chuang & Liao, 2010; Gardner, Wright, & Moynihan, 2011; Guthrie, 2001; Huselid, 1995).

The proposition of relationships between HRM systems and HR attribution are based on two rationales. The first is rooted in signaling theory (Rynes, 1991). In behavioral research, signaling theory explains that organizations have management policies to deliver their expectations to employees. Employees may build their understandings about the goals of organizations, create psychological contracts with the organizations, develop certain attitudes, and behave as the organizations desire. Many scholars in HRM and management literature are alike in their utilization of the signaling theory to illustrate how HRM practices influence employees’ perceptions of the workplace (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel., 2011; Ehrnrooth & Bjorkman, 2012; Kalshoven & Boon, 2012; Sanders et al., 2014; Wright & Nishii, 2013). They explain that HRM practices are regarded as a means for firms to clarify to employees their expectations in terms of attitudes, behavior, and performance (Nishii et al., 2008). The benefits that signaling theory offers as a rationale for HRM function have led to a dramatic increase in its use in HRM literature and management literature (Connelly et al. 2011).
The second rationale is rooted in social information processing theory. According to the social information processing approach (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), how employees develop attitudes and behaviors in the workplace is explained by how the employees perceive the information they have received from the surrounding environments. Applying this argument to the behavioral perspective of HRM, it can be inferred that employees’ perceptions of HRM practices determine their attitudinal and behavioral reactions. In other words, the social information processing model posits that employees’ perceptions of HRM practices is the result of the messages delivered through HRM practices. Such perceptions determine employees’ attitudes and behaviors, which in turn lead to greater performance and the achievement of a firm’s strategic objectives.

In line with those studies in HRM literature, this study believes that signaling theory is a useful theoretical foundation for illustrating how employees develop perceptions regarding the HRM practices they have been experiencing. As Bowen and Ostroff (2004) described, HRM practices are designed and implemented to convey management messages to employees. In other words, HRM practices send signals to employees about what the organization pursues as its goals and the attitudes and behaviors the organization expects from its employees. These messages which are delivered to employees go through information processing and then turn into attitude and behavior. If the messages are strong and salient, they would reduce interpretation errors which would be resulted by individuals’ unique schemas; they would create certain psychological status such as HR attribution, and then effectively influence individual employees’ attitudes and behavior (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Therefore, HRM system-
HR attribution relationship can be inferred from the accumulated evidence of HRM practices-attitudes/behavior links in HRM literature.

A few scholars have in fact proposed the HRM system-HR attribution link (Sanders et al., 2014; Nishii & Wright, 2008). One study even provided empirical evidence. In their recent study, Van De Voorde and Beijer (2015) focused upon high-performance work system (HPWS) as a type of HRM system, and illustrated the positive links between HPWS and HR attribution of well-being and productivity. Following their arguments, this study also focuses on the role of an HRM system in creating employee HR attribution utilizing the multiple HRM systems perspective. Although the relationship was not hypothesized, Kooij and colleagues’ (2013) work also described the positive relationship between a certain HR system (i.e., HPWS) and HR attribution for employee well-being.

Similarly, this study expects to find dynamic relationships between one type of HRM system and the two types of HR attribution. Rather than focusing on HPWS, it focuses on the HRM system for productivity (i.e., productivity-based HRM system). Productivity-based HRM system refers to an HRM system that consists of practices that cut costs and bring about immediate returns. The definition and theories for this system are borrowed from Lepak and Snell’s HRM architecture arguments (1999).

The most advanced arguments for multiple HRM systems are provided by Lepak and Snell’s (1999, 2002) HRM architecture perspective. This perspective illustrates that not all employees are equal in their strategic value or in the uniqueness of their skills. Therefore, an organization would like to manage those employees differently, and to do so it assigns each employee in one of the four different employment modes, which are
knowledge-based employment, job-based employment, contractual work arrangements, and alliance/partnerships, based on the employees’ strategic value and the uniqueness of their skills. Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) further theorized that once an individual employee is placed in one of the employment modes, the organization designs certain sets of HRM practices that work best for the employment modes. This is called HRM configuration.

The logic of HRM configuration is that there are four types of HRM based on whether the firms internalize or externalize the employment relationship, and whether the firms pursue long-term relational focused relationship or short-term economy exchange relationship. What the authors illustrated was that if the employees are knowledge-based workers, the organization pursues internalized and long-term relationships with them by providing high commitment-based HRM configuration. If the employees are job-based employees, the organization pursues internalized but transactional relationships with them by providing a productivity-based HRM configuration. They also explained that the externalized HRM configurations are used for those employees who are not strategically valuable, and it is unnecessary for firms to keep them in the organization. Thus, the organization focuses more on collaborations and compliance with those employees who may stay out of the organization but work for it. The two types of HRM configuration they proposed are compliance-based HRM configuration and collaborative-based HRM configurations.

This study focuses on a productivity-based HRM system because that system is what most companies adopt for regular employees. In the literature, HPWS has been the dominant topic in strategic HRM studies and there is a great deal of evidence for the
positive influences of HPWS on employees’ mental status, abilities, motivations, attitudes, and behavior (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Jiang et al., 2012). Nevertheless, studies have noted that many companies either do not use HPWS or they provide HPWS to selective employees out concerns over the labor cost increase associated with using HPWS (Sels, De Winne, Maes, Delmotte, Faems, & Forrier, 2006). As HPWS ensures employees’ long-term development and performance, it should be regarded as an investment and the labor cost for using HPWS would be much more than using other HRM systems such as productivity-based HRM system or control-based HRM system. Consequently, to mitigate the cost associated with HPWS, a company would like to provide HPWS only to those employees with whom the company intends to pursue long-term relationships. Thus, few employees in the organization enjoy the benefits of HPWS, while many are more likely to have an HRM system that aims at economic transactions between the company and employees. These arguments are in line with the perspective of HR architecture, which delineates multiple HRM systems designed to be administered to employees based on their strategic value and uniqueness of skills (Lepak & Snell, 1999, 2002). Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) explained that employees in the productivity-based HRM configuration are expected to perceive management as using HRM practices to exploit them. This HRM configuration includes practices that cut costs and bring about immediate returns such as hiring for immediate contribution, market rate compensation, limited investment in training, narrow job assignments, and limited discretion in decision making. This type of HRM configuration is known as HRM for cost reduction or a control-focused HRM system (Arthur, 1994). In this case, rather than considering long-term relational employment, employees and their
firms both consider short-term economic transactional relationships. Therefore, with these productivity-based HRM practices, employees are likely to perceive that the firm only pursues economy exchange relationships and getting the maximum work from employees. This perception can be explained by the HRM attribution for employee exploitation (Nishii et al., 2008). Consequently, a positive relationship is expected between a job-based HRM system and employees’ HRM attribution for employee exploitation.

Although the positive and strong relationships between productivity-based HRM system and employee exploitation HR attribution is predicted, the current study also expects positive but weak relationships between a productivity-based HRM system and HRM attribution for employee well-being. It expects these relations because considering the nature of this HRM configuration (i.e., internalizing the employees in the organization), a productivity-based HR system also targets creating employees’ motivation to stay in the organization. With training opportunities, decision-making opportunities, promotion opportunities, and the decent bonuses and incentives with good performance, employees will perceive that the organization may want them to stay in the organization for the long term, which may make them think the organization cares for them.

Productivity-based HRM System, HR Attribution, and LMX as a Moderator

For management, the primary goal of using certain HRM practices is inducing employees’ attitudes and work behaviors that are necessary for achieving firm’s goals. Building upon the social cognition perspective, HRM practices should yield consistent interpretation among employees to be the most effective because cognition precedes
attitudes and work behavior. However, some scholars have noted that the interpretation of environments can differ across people. For example, Chan (1998) illustrated that the psychological climate (i.e., each individual’s perception of organization’s policies and procedures) can vary among individuals within the same unit. Also, Nishii and colleagues (2008) described that individuals may hold different perceptions of the goals of HRM practices using the two studies that explored the case of pay for performance system (pp. 510-511).

The current study, adopting the social exchange perspective, also focuses on leaders’ roles in influencing subordinates’ perceptions of HRM attribution. Such a focus is motivated by three ideas. First, as a leader is regarded as the “agent” of the company (Eigenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002), leaders’ attitudes or behavior would also be considered as the proxy of management’s attitudes or behaviors. Therefore, followers would use the leaders’ behaviors as the cues for understanding intentions of management using HRM practices (Liden, Sparrowe & Wayne, 1997). Second, according to socialization literature, leaders are one of the most reliable informants from the inside who provide critical information to those on the outside, information that is used for subordinates’ performance and their well-being in workplace (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Lam, 2003; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996). Given this, there is a definite influence by leaders on subordinates’ perception about the organization and management. Lastly, leaders play a critical role, as noted by several scholars (e.g., Nishii et al., 2008; Nishii & Wright, 2008; Khilji & Wang, 2006), in delivering HRM practices to employees. According to these scholars, leaders execute on a daily basis the HRM system in the
organizations’ undertaking of the responsibilities of recruitment, selection, performance management, rewards, training and development, involvement, and information sharing (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Zohar, 2000). Consequently, being an important factor in implementing HRM system, leaders are liable for his/her subordinate’s experience with HRM system.

Of the well-developed leadership theories, LMX is employed in this study to address how a leader can influence an individual’s perception of the HRM system. LMX theory was developed based on the assumption of variation in leader’s treatment of subordinates. The well-known leadership theories such as transactional leadership assume that leaders behave in certain way when they manage subordinates and that this behavior is consistent across all subordinates. Therefore, while these theories cannot provide theoretical support for the variety in employees experience with leaders and organizations, LMX is able to provide a theoretical foundation for employees’ diverse experience with leader and organization. Thus, this study believes that LMX can be used as a lens through which to see the variety of employees’ experiences with HRM, organization, and social influences.

The concept of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) has emerged from the differentiated dyadic relationships of “in-group” and “out-group.” In this line of studies, there are “in-group” members who enjoy the high-quality exchange relationships with leaders and “out-group” members who have poor exchange relationships with leaders. The findings of those studies show that depending on the quality of LMX relationship, the followers develop different cognitive responses toward the leader and the organization. The person who has a high-quality exchange relationship with a leader has
trust, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization. The person in a low-quality exchange relationship with a leader tends to have low trust, less professional respect, and a sense of having little obligation to the leader or the organization (Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995; Rosen, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011; Scandura, Graen, & Novak, 1986; Wayne, Shore & Liden, 1997).

Extending the LMX literature, it can be inferred that LMX would influence followers’ perceptions of HRM practices because the literature has illustrated that “in-group” and “out-group” members might experience the managerial practices distinctively depending on the degree of the LMX that subordinates hold. That is, “in-group” employees would experience favorable treatment from management; this is equivalent to commitment-based HRM. “Out-group” employees are of course less likely to be afforded such treatment. The empirical findings from some studies support this argument. According to them, “in-group” members are more likely to have inflated performance ratings compared to the “out-group” members (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Liden et al., 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Furthermore, as the performance evaluation is related to the compensation plans, “in-group” members tend to have better opportunities for promotion, raises, and contingent pay (Graen & Uhl-Bein, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Fetter, 1993). Besides the experience of pay and performance evaluation practices, “in-group” members have more opportunities to be involved in decision making, more autonomy for their tasks, and enjoy more growth opportunities (i.e., training, developmental opportunity) than “out-group” members (Artwater & Yammarino, 1997; Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). Thus, the favorable
treatment resulting from high LMX should build up positive perceptions of the organization, and therefore offset the influence of a productivity-based HRM system.

Although there is no study that tests the effect of LMX on employees’ perceptions of HRM attribution, the effect can be inferred by the psychological outcomes presented in LMX studies. In their comprehensive review of LMX studies, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) explained that high-quality LMX positively influences the subordinates’ feelings of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived organizational support (also see Frone, 2000; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Setton, Bennet, & Liden, 1996), all of which would be considered the consequences of positive attribution toward the HRM system (Nishii et al., 2008).

The argument about the impact of LMX on employees’ perception of organizational support (POS) raises an important implication about how employees perceive the attribution of an HRM system because POS refers to the extent to which employees perceive how much the organization values the employees’ well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). When a subordinate with high LMX receives favorable treatment from his/her leader, regarding the leader as the agent of the company, (s)he would interpret the favorable treatment to come from the company (Liden et al., 1997). Consequently, the subordinate may perceive that the HRM practices are adopted to take care of and support the employees in the company. In contrast, a subordinate with low LMX may experience scant support from the company, with limited information offered, fewer chances to voice opinions, and fewer rewards (Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982; Pelletier, 2012). Thus, (s)he would understand the intention of
the HRM system as wanting to get the most work out of employees rather than to make them feel valued.

Building on the aforementioned arguments and findings of the LMX studies, the current study proposes that LMX provides additional information in explaining how employees develop HRM attribution perception beyond the effects of HRM practices. Particularly, the current study proposes that LMX will moderate the positive relationship between HRM systems and an individual’s perception of HRM attribution, such that high LMX will weaken the positive relationship between productivity-based HRM and HRM attribution for employee exploitation, and low LMX would reinforce the link between commitment-based HRM and HRM attribution for employee exploitation.

\textit{Hypothesis 1a:} LMX moderates the positive relationship between \textit{Productivity-based HRM system} and employee \textit{HR attribution for well-being}, such that high LMX strengthens the relationships.

\textit{Hypothesis 1b:} LMX moderates the positive relationship between \textit{Productivity-based HRM system} and employee \textit{HR attribution for exploitation}, such that high LMX weakens the relationships.

\textbf{Relative LMX and HRM Attribution}

LMX theory has provided meaningful and intriguing findings that have been used as a foundation to understand group dynamics. The majority of previous research, however, has tested the individual-level consequences of LMX (Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2008; Linden et al., 2006). Regarding the group context, LMX scholars have recently argued that a multi-level perspective should be introduced to
LMX research. In line with multilevel researchers who stress the importance of contexts in individual-level phenomenon (e.g., Klein & Kozlowski, 2000), LMX researchers emphasize the necessity of investigating group-level LMX. They argue that differentiation of LMX has been presented in LMX studies (i.e., in-group and out-group arguments of LMX), but it has got less attention in the LMX literature. Further, they have noted that LMX is a phenomenon that occurs in a group setting (i.e., multiple subordinates are nested under a leader and they altogether make a group). Thus LMX would be better understood when the group-level LMX is taken into consideration. (Harris, Li, & Kirkman, 2014; Hooper & Martin, 2008; Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). In the literature, a few group-level LMX constructs have been proposed and tested. One of them is the average LMX in a group, like the group mean LMX (e.g., Erdogan, & Enders, 2007), but not much attention has been paid to differentiations in LMX. Building on social comparison theory, scholars of differentiation in LMX argue that employees in a work group tend to compare their own dyadic relationships with the leader to those of other group members. Hence, the different relationships among a leader and multiple subordinates within in a group create a certain social context through which each individual develops his/her own perception about the work group and obligations in the employment relationship (Henderson et al, 2008). LMX differentiation, LMX social comparison, and relative LMX have been presented as group-level contextual factors created by differentiations in LMX within a group (Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010). Since the differentiation constructs in LMX stem from LMX, they are related to each other. However, each of the constructs in differentiated LMX holds unique features. For
example, LMX differentiation refers to the variability in LMX relationships within in a team. Therefore, it is a construct that illustrates group-level phenomenon. On the other hand, RLMX is considered as either an individual- or cross-level construct that assumes interaction between LMX and the average LMX within a group (Hu & Liden, 2013). LMX social comparison is also distinctive from other constructs by presenting the heterogeneity of LMX within a group (Harris et al., 2014). In the differentiated LMX arguments, social comparison theory is employed as a theoretical rationale for understanding how differentiated LMX is related to other phenomena in the group and organization. Social comparison theory posits that people seek out accurate appraisals of their abilities to figure out their standing within a group. They initially use stable and non-social standards to make stable appraisals, but if non-social standards are unavailable, people turn to comparing themselves with coworkers (Bunnk & Gobbons, 2007; Festinger, 1954; Ho, 2005; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Wood, 1989). An individual’s comparison process tends to result in the focal individuals’ cognitive responses, such as equity or fairness perception. This in turn facilitates certain attitudes and behaviors (Grienberger, Rutte, & Van Knippenberg, 1997).

Among those differentiated LMX constructs, the focus of this study is Relative LMX (RLMX). RLMX refers to an individual’s relative standing of LMX in the work group (Graen, Liden, & Hoel, 1982; Henderson et al., 2008). RLMX assesses the degree to which an individual’s LMX differs from the average LMX in the work group, and can be operationalized as the subtraction of the group-mean LMX from individual LMX score (Henderson et al., 2008). Emphasizing the interaction between LMX and group average LMX, the RLMX argument provides a more compelling explanation about how
an individual develops certain responses to situations in a group by investigating both individual- (i.e., individual LMX) and group-level LMX (i.e., average LMX within a group) concurrently. Because the theory of social comparison illustrates at least two observations: the observation of what the person who makes comparison has and what others in the comparison group have, examining both individual and group LMX would be more aligned with social comparison theory than other differentiated LMX constructs. For that reason, some studies have even proposed that variability in LMX in the work group has no direct impact on employee outcomes, but merely interacts with individual LMX to influence employee outcomes (Harris et al., 2014). Adhering to this argument, this study suggests that it is necessary to investigate the interaction of individual LMX and group average LMX to explore the individual outcomes of the social comparison process in the investigations of HR attribution emergency and its consequences.

Despite the traditional arguments of LMX, which assume the positive association with LMX and outcomes, the influence of RLMX as a moderator on HR attribution links would be a little bit complicated since the construct of HR attribution is folded into two opposite types. Thus this study postulates that the influence of RLMX on HR attribution should be explained and tested based on both the type of HR attribution and level of RLMX.

First, regarding the RLMX and HR attribution for well-being, this study posits that low RLMX weakens an employee’s perception of HR attribution for well-being in such a way that the positive relationship between productivity HR and HR attribution for well-being is weaker for those with low RLMX. This argument is based on the justice perspectives. In the LMX literature, justice and fairness have been popular topics and
studies have illustrated the strong positive relationship between LMX and justices including interpersonal justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001), distributive justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), and procedural justice (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002). According to these studies, followers with high LMX tend to have more justice perception, which in turn generates positive outcomes such as organizational commitment, satisfaction, and OCBs (Masterson et al., 2000; Rockstuhl, Dulehohn, Ang, & Shore, 2012; Tekleab, Takeuchi, & Taylor, 2005). Therefore, it is expected that employees’ perceptions of management’s intention for promoting well-being is stronger for those with high LMX and weaker for those with low LMX.

Similarly, it is expected that RLMX strengthens the perception of HR attribution for exploitation among employees, especially for those with low RLMX. The followers with low LMX tend to experience injustice in management practices, in resources given to do a task, and in interactions with a leader. Such instances of injustice would be perceived as worse if the group has a high level of LMX differentiation. This is because such individuals are able to observe others with high LMX being accustomed to better and favorable treatment from the leader. Experiencing low distributive justice when the leader controls rewards and poor interpersonal justice with limited communication and participation opportunity, the followers blame the injustice as the organization’s problem, and conclude that the organization doesn’t care about its employees. This perception, it is expected, creates and fortifies the perception of HR attribution for exploitation. Consequently, it is expected that the degree to which an employee attributes to management the intention to exploit is contingent on the employee’s level of RLMX.
The positive-negative asymmetry effect proposes that a negative experience has a greater impact on human cognition than does a positive experience (Peeters, 1971). In light of this, it is predicted that the influence of RLMX on HR attribution is more certain for group members with low RLMX than for those with high RLMX. This study’s hypotheses regarding the moderation effects of RLMX on HR attribution are described in the view of low RLMX, and the hypothesis as below.

**Hypothesis 2a:** The positive relationship between a Productivity-based HRM system and HR attribution of well-being is contingent on RLMX, such that the relationship is stronger for those with high RLMX.

**Hypothesis 2b:** The positive relationship between a Productivity-based HRM system and HR attribution of exploitation is contingent on RLMX, such that the relationship is weaker for those with high RLMX.

**HRM Attribution and Individual Performance, Organizational Citizenship Behavior, and Turnover Intention**

The operation mechanism of an HRM system that induces desired attitudes and behaviors can be explained by the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB). According to Ajzen and colleagues (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), TRA and TPB explain that people’s behaviors are the results of people’s intention to conduct those behaviors, and this intention is strongly related to the attitudes toward and perception about environments and themselves (TPB: attitudes to behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral controls). In other words, after receiving information from the surrounding environment, people come to understand what they need to do or how to respond to gain the best benefits for themselves. Then they develop
intentions, which if they are sufficiently motivated, translate into behaviors. In light of this theory, it can be anticipated that the employees’ behaviors induced by HRM practices are the results of employees’ understanding of what the firms require to take from employees. In other words, HRM practices first shape employees’ perceptions about the goals of a firm and the firm’s view of employees. These perceptions in turn impact how employees behave.

Thus, if employees perceive that the intention behind HRM practices is to create employee well-being, then the employees would develop the intention to pay back the favorable treatment of firms with in-role and extra-role behaviors, and to realize their intention. Further, the employees would have the intention to stay in the firm for the long term to contribute to the firm’s goal achievement and to maximize their gains. These propositions are based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger et al., 1986). This theory illustrates the motivation behind attitudes and behaviors between two parties, positing that a party creates a sense of obligation to reciprocate the attitudes or behaviors of the other party. Consequently, if an employee perceives that a firm cares about its employees, the employee develops a feeling of obligation to return the firm’s favorable treatment. Because of this, the employee engenders positive attitudes toward work behavior, which contribute to the firm’s well-being. Thus, the focal employee has the strong intention to carry out the behaviors desired by the firm, such as in-role behavior (i.e., performance) and extra role behavior (i.e., organizational citizenship behavior). The employee also expresses a long-term commitment to firm (i.e., intention to stay with the firm).
There are a line of studies in HRM and management fields that attest to the arguments above. For example, Nishii and colleagues (2008) verified that the employees with HRM attribution of employee well-being tended to have more commitment and perform more helping behaviors. The perceived organizational support (POS) studies in HRM literature also provide findings of the positive relationship between POS and commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors (Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998; Shore & Wayne, 1993), performance (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Erdogan & Enders, 2007; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997), and low turnover intentions (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003).

On the other hand, HR attribution of employee exploitation plays a role as a norm that makes employees meet the performance standard, but doesn’t motivate employees to make extra efforts on behalf of the organization. Further, this HRM attribution compels employees to leave a firm if there is a better offer from another firm. The findings presented in Nishii and colleagues’ work (2008) showed a clear negative link between HRM attribution of employee exploitation and helping behavior, supporting the notion that employees who think the HRM is designed only to maximize employees’ performance don’t have motivation to go beyond what is strictly needed.

The relationship between HR attribution and OCB is likely more complicated, as scholars in OCB have proposed multiple forms of OCB (OCBs for the term includes multiple categories of OCB) categorized by the targets of OCBs. Williams and Anderson (1991) illustrated two categories of OCBs: (1) OCBI (i.e., OCB-individual), the behavior beneficial to particular individuals, and (2) OCBO (OCB-organization), the
behavior beneficial to an organization. Also proposed was OCBS (OCB-supervisor), which refers to the helping behavior directed at a supervisor.

To explore the effects of HR attribution on employee outcomes, and the moderating effects of LMX, a study should include OCBO, and OCBS among the OCBs, but they call for separated examinations. In theory, as Nishii and colleagues (2008) presented, the HR attribution is more likely related to OCBO rather than OCBS since HR attribution is considered the results of employees’ perception of HR practices given by the organization. On the other hand, OCBS would not be related to HR attribution since a supervisor is not identical to an organization. However, in considering whether HR attribution is influenced by LMX and RLMX, it would be more appropriate to test the effects of HR attribution on OCBS. Consequently, in the exploration of the influences of HR attribution on employees’ outcomes, this study tests both OCBO and OCBS in accordance with the theories.

Concerning OCBO, this study posits the positive link of HR attribution for well-being and OCBO and the negative link of HR attribution for exploitation and OCBO. As mentioned above, when employees experience positive treatments from the organization in the workplace, they develop a feeling of obligation and try to return the favorable experience with better performance or behavior that goes beyond their duties. The returns should be made to the organization (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). This argument is in line with the findings of Nishii and colleagues’ paper (2008), which showed a clear negative link between HRM attribution of employee exploitation and helping behavior. Further, studies in LMX have presented evidence of a positive effect from LMX on OCBS. Also mediators of the link between LMX and OCBS include
perception of justice, satisfaction, and perceived perception (e.g., Masterson et al., 2000; Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007).

In sum, HRM attribution for well-being is expected to be positively related to employee performance and OCBO and OCBS, and negatively related to turnover intention. In contrast, HRM attribution for employee exploitation is expected to be negatively related to employee performance as well as organizational citizenship behavior toward organization and toward supervisor, and positively related to turnover intention.

*Hypothesis 3a: HR attribution for well-being is positively related to employees’ OCBO, OCBS, and performance, and negatively related to turnover intention.*

*Hypothesis 3b: HR attribution for exploitation is negatively related to employee OCBO, OCBS, and performance, and positively related to turnover intention.*

**Relative LMX, HR attribution and Employee Outcomes**

Beyond the effects of RLMX on the relationship between HRM system and HR attribution, RLMX is expected to influence the relationship between HR attribution and employee outcomes, especially OCBS, performance, and turnover intention.

According to the traditional assumption of LMX which speculates on the linkages between high LMX and positive outcomes, high RLMX is more likely to be associated with positive outcomes. Some studies in differentiated LMX have shown the positive
linkages between RLMX and individual outcomes such as self-efficacy (e.g., Hu & Liden, 2013), and psychological contract fulfillment (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008). These findings support LMX theory, which assumes subordinates receiving more favorable treatment from leaders are happier and more satisfied than those less favored recipients.

However, some researchers have brought forward an opposite proposition as well as findings about the traditional assumption of the linkage between RLMX and its outcomes. In their investigation into the effects of LMX differentiation on self-efficacy and creativity in teams, Liao and colleagues (2010) found evidence of negative influence from LMX differentiation on team creativity. Further, Gooty and Yammarino (2013) showed that high LMX differentiation is negatively associated with performance, and this negative relationship got stronger for those who had higher LMX.

By reviewing this contradictory evidence of LMX differentiation, Kauppila (2016) built two theoretical arguments about why LMX differentiation results in negative effects and why the negative effects are stronger for those with high LMX. The first is that this phenomenon is caused by the stress induced by an increase sense of obligation. Relying on social exchange perspective, LMX theory has illustrated that special care and treatment from a leader do not come free. They are accompanied with a feeling of obligation to return the treatment with better performance. Further, a trusted follower is more likely to have heavier workloads than others who are less trusted. Consequently, high LMX results in a high level of stress, which is detrimental to the work outcomes.

The second argument concerns the possibility of change in status. If high LMX differentiation exists within a group, it sends the signal that one’s status could change –
for better or worse. Hoping to improve their status, followers with low LMX will strive to increase their performance and be helpful. Although followers with high LMX continue to work hard to maintain their status, the motivation level is stronger for those with low LMX. Taken together, the relationships between LMX and outcomes would look like weaker for those with high RLMX. As the support for his argument, Kauppila (2016) pointed to a study by Liden et al. (2006).

Applying the above arguments in HR attribution-employee outcome linkages, this study expects the moderating role of RLMX in the relationships such that the degree to which employees engage in OCBO, OCBs, and performance are stronger for those with low RLMX in general because their motivation to improve their status in the group and organization is stronger than that of employees with high RLMX, and because employees with high RLMX have already high levels of workloads and stress, leaving them too exhausted to engage OCBs and better performance. On the other hand, per the turnover intention, it is expected that the motivation for changing an organization is stronger for those with low RLMX as they don’t appreciate the treatment offered by the organization or the leader. Their level of motivation for changing organizations is the same as it is for engaging OCBs and increasing performance. That is, improving status and getting better treatment. Thus, the turnover intention is stronger for those with low RLMX than for those with high RLMX.

However, the role of LMX and LMX differentiation (i.e., RLMX in this study) in shaping employees’ performance and behavior should be influenced by the HR attribution. Especially, for those with high RLMX, the environment would play a role of buffering the negative effects of RLMX such as stress or burnout. When employees have
feeling of well-being with HRM practices, it means that they have more training opportunity, flexible time, good benefit and participation opportunity (Nishii et al., 2008). All of them help employees deal with hardships at work. For example, training would improve their abilities and with the improved abilities, it would be easier for the employees to perform. Also as the employees are able to influence their schedules and tasks by participating in the decision making, they would like to be less stressed but more performing. In addition, since they have more flexibility than others, they can engage in helping behavior to support the organization and the leader. Consequently, for those with high RLMX and HR attribution for well-being, their performance and work behavior would be more positive and better in comparison of those with low RLMX or/and HR attribution for exploitation.

In sum, it is predicted that for those with low RLMX they have a stronger relationship with HR attribution for OCBs and performance, but the relationship would be depending on how employees perceive their organization (i.e., HR attributions) as well. The positive relationship between HR attribution for well-being and employee outcomes would be stronger for employees with high RLMX than employees with low RLMX. Still, when an employee has bad relationship with either the leader (i.e., low RLMX) or the organization (i.e., HR attribution for exploitation), the motivation level for improving the bad relationships would be stronger for people with both bad relationships. Thus this study suggests below hypotheses.

\textit{Hypothesis 4a: The relationships between HR attribution for well-being and employee OCB, OCBS, and performance are contingent on RLMX, such that}
the positive relationship between HR attribution for well-being and OCBO, OCBS, and performance are stronger for those with high RLMX.

**Hypothesis 4b**: The relationships between HR attribution for exploitation and employee OCBO, OCBS, and performance are contingent on RLMX, such that the negative relationship between HR attribution for exploitation and OCBO, OCBS, and performance are weaker for those with low RLMX.

**Hypothesis 4c**: The relationships between HR attribution for well-being and employee and turnover intention are contingent on RLMX, such that the negative relationship between HR attribution for well-being and turnover intention is stronger for those with low RLMX.

**Hypothesis 4d**: The relationships between HR attribution for exploitation and employee and turnover intention are contingent on RLM, such that the positive relationship between HR attribution for exploitation and turnover intention is stronger for those with low RLMX.
METHODS

Sample and Procedure

To test the hypothesized model, this study employed data from a construction company in South Korea. This construction company is one of the subsidiaries of a holding company and operates its business in iron making, construction, steel production, and civil and environmental engineering. The company was planning to conduct an employee survey to explore employees’ thoughts on the company’s HRM system and one of survey administrators contacted the researcher for survey consultation. After several discussions, it was agreed to test employees’ HR attribution and other related constructs in the company. The survey administrator selected 1,279 employees in 105 groups and administered all survey procedures. The survey administrator disseminated the survey online, and it was delivered to target employees via the email system of the organization by the survey administrator. In the email which employees received, there was an introduction to the survey that explained its purpose, that participation was voluntary, and a consent form was included. If an employee agreed to participate, he or she followed the link provided in the email to complete the survey. Two weeks later, a reminder was sent to target employees to encourage survey participation. The survey for managers was sent one month after the employee survey had been administered. The procedure of survey administration for managers was identical to that for employees.

Of the 1,279 employees in 105 groups, 790 employees and 98 group managers responded to the survey. Most of the survey respondents turned in a good quality answers. Because this study investigated RLMX, which is interdependent of group
membership, the responses were sorted based on two criteria. First, based on the suggested response rate within group for group analysis, and in accordance of response rate in differentiated LMX studies, this study used only the sample which had more than 50% of response rate within a group. Further, with the concern of weaker influence of LMX as the group gets larger, this study included only the sample with a group size of less than or equal to 30. Overall, the average response rate was 64%, which meets the cutoff standard suggested by Timmerman (2005). The group size is 18.26, which is similar to group sizes presented in the RLMX literature (e.g., Henderson et al., 2008).

The final sample was 499 employees across 53 groups, which yielded response rates as of 39% for employees and 48.6% for managers.

The average age of the employee sample was 39.9 year old, and 91% among them were male. 85% of the employees were engineers and technicians. 64% of respondents had work experience at other companies. Among the group leaders, 1% were female, 72% had jobs in engineering and technology areas, and majority of them had working experience in other companies (98%).

Measures

Productivity-based HRM system. Group managers and employees rated the 51-item HR configurations scale used by Lepak and Snell (2002: pp. 527-528). The instructions for the questionnaire for the group managers stated the following: “Please provide the best estimates of the uses of HRM practices for your group.” For group members, the following was stated: “Please provide the extent to which you have experienced the HRM practices.” Given that the focus of the current study is testing the
impacts of experienced HRM system on employee outcomes in a group setting, this study used the experienced HRM systems as presented by each employee’s response. Manager’s responses were employed to test the congruence between implemented and experienced HRM systems.

Of the 51 items for the HR configuration scale, 16 targeted productivity-based HR practices. They included such statements as “The training activities for me seek to increase short-term productivity,” and “Performance appraisal for me is based on objective, quantifiable results.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was 0.85.

**Leader and Member Exchange.** The 7-item LMX scale developed by Scandura and Graen (1984) was administrated to group members. Questions included “How would you characterize your working relationship with your supervisor” and “How well does your supervisor understand your job problems and need” (Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009). The Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was 0.94.

**Relative Leader and Member Exchange.** In accordance with the original measure of relative LMX (Liden et al., 2006), mean individual-level LMX score within a group was subtracted from individual LMX to assess RLMX (Henderson et al., 2008; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Because of the interdependence of LMX and RLMX, researchers in RLMX recently suggested the use of Polynomial regression technique to calculate RLMX from LMX information (Hu & Liden, 2013; Vidyarthi et al., 2010). In this study, however, the subtraction approach was adopted for two reasons. First, the current polynomial regression approach offers only testing of RLMX as an independent variable but does not provide techniques for testing the moderating effects of RLMX
(Witt, 1998). Consequently, focusing on the purpose of this study which is testing the interactive effects of RLMX, this study employed the original method for accessing RLMX. Second, Tse and colleagues (2012) used the original subtraction method arguing that the subtraction measure changes the outcomes very little. They further showed concerns about errors in analyzing perceptual variables. This is because polynomial analysis doesn’t offer correcting in errors; this refers to the limitations noted in Edwards’ (1995) original paper of polynomial regression for difference score. In addition, results from another RLMX study by Vidyarthi and colleagues (2010) show that the regression approach would work for testing RLMX. This is due to the polynomial regression results showing linear relationships rather than quadratic relational patterns. Therefore, because of the methodological limits and theoretical suggestion in another study, this study employed the original subtracting method.

**HR Attribution.** Employees’ rating of attribution of HRM was assessed using the 15-item survey developed by Nishii and colleagues (2008). They developed the measures that access four types of HR attribution—care for people, quality of products and service, exploitation employees, and for reducing costs. Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis, they concluded that the first two HR attribution types could be combined into one factor and the other two into another. Also used was a measure to assess all four types of HR attribution. Statements included “My company pays its employees what it does: (1) in order to help employees deliver quality service to customers; (2) so that employees will feel valued and respected – to promote employee well-being; (3) to try to keep costs down; (4) because they are required to by the union contract; (5) in order to get the most work out of employees.”
The construct of HR attribution was developed after thorough methodological tests and investigation as described in Nishii et al. (2008). However, a few papers have examined this construct. A search on Web of science and EBSCO, and Google scholar with the term of HR attribution turned up only two papers as empirical papers using the HR attribution construct. One of them was Nishii and colleagues’ original HR attribution paper and the other was Van De Voorde and Beijer’s work (2015). Thus, the current study employed Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) first to find items that may not be associated with the construct using SPSS (23, 2015). Two items were dropped off due to cross-loading.

Next, Confirmatory Factory Analysis (CFA) was conducted using Lisrel (9.1, 2013) to find the most appropriate structures of measure. In CFA, one factor, two factor, three factor, and four factor models were compared. The fit indexes of 1 factor model were $\chi^2 = 2802.30$, RMSEA = .26, SRMR = .16, CFI = .66, and NNFI = .59. 2 factor model showed fit indexes as $\chi^2 = 1842.19$, RMSEA = .16, CFI = .86, and SRMR = .08, while the 3 factor model showed superior fit indexes $\chi^2 = 1209.20$, RMSEA = .08, CFI = .96, and SRMR = .03. The 4-factor model showed unacceptable levels of fit indexes. All of the factor analyses implied that the scale would have three factors unlike what Nishii and colleagues suggested.

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Insert Table 1 about here
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Principle Component Analysis with varimax rotation was conducted as a supplementary analysis using SPSS (23, 2015) and the results showed the HR attribution
for quality and HR attribution for concern for people could be loaded on to one factor. The items of HR attribution for exploitation were loaded on to two factors as seen in CFA results.

Considering the items used for accessing HR attribution as a pre-validated measure, the two-factor structure for HR attribution for exploitation in this data suggests further investigation. The two-factor structure of this data has a two-fold explanation. First, there is the context of the company whose industry is construction. This company, since it was founded, has maintained the norm for employees of saving costs and increasing efficiency. The founder of this company and its chief executive officer is known for frugality. The top management’s emphasis on saving costs might have spread through the company and become a company philosophy. Consequently, rather than having hostility toward the philosophy of cost saving, employees are more likely to accept it. Therefore, due to this company-specific context, the HR attribution for cost saving might not be combined with HR attribution for exploiting employees which would likely create a negative perception.

Second, in the original paper, Nishii and colleagues first theoretically assumed that HR attribution for exploitation consisted of two dimensions, as shown in the factor analysis results of this current study. After conducting factor analysis, they concluded that the two dimensions were loaded on to one factor and they concluded they were one construct. Giving consideration to their original arguments the separations of HR
attribution for exploitation into two sub-dimensions (i.e., HR attribution for exploiting employees and HR attribution for cost reduction) might be theoretical.

Relying on the original theory, research context, and data structure, this study considered the HR attribution for exploitation to be two separate constructs, consistent with the factor analysis results. Such a consideration, it must be noted, is debatable. In the following analyses, testing HR attribution for exploitation in the model was repeated twice for each HR attribution for exploiting employees and HR attribution for cost reduction. The results are presented separately. The Cronbach alpha for HR attribution for well-being was .95. The Cronbach alpha for HR attribution for exploiting employees was .91. The reliability scale was .84 for HR attribution for cost reduction.

Performance. Performance information was obtained from the company. Using archival data is desired as the information is less likely contaminated by self-serving bias. The performance appraisal information was collected by the company through one of its annual performance appraisal processes. Since the survey was administered in 2014, the performance data used in this study is from the 2014 performance appraisal. Two dimensions of performance were assessed—task-related performance and capability-related performance. Focusing on the task-related performance, the task performance data of 2014 was selected. The task performance data was recorded in four categories—S, A, B, C, and D. S indicates excellent work performance; A indicates good performance; B indicates meeting the expectation; C indicates needs improvement; and D indicates poor performance. The categories were recoded into numeric variables (i.e., 1-5, 1 is D and 5 is S), and used in the model test as a categorical variable.
Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Employees rated the degree to which they are conducting organizational citizenship behavior described in the survey. For the measure of OCB toward organization (OCBO) and OCB toward supervisor (OCBS), Williams and Anderson’s measure of OCB was employed. For OCBO, an example item is “Adhere to informal rules devised to maintain order.” OCB to the supervisor was assessed by Rupp and Cropanzano’s (2002) five-item measure, which modified Williams and Anderson’s (1991) original measure for OCB beneficial to specific individuals. Sample items include “Assists you with your work when not asked” and “Helps you when you have a heavy workload.” Cronbach’s alphas for OCBO and OCBS are 0.89 and 0.91 respectively.

Turnover intention. Employees’ intention for turnover was assessed by the three-item measure developed by Konovsky and Cropanzano (1991). The items are as follows: “I intend to look for a job outside of this company within the next year,” “I intend to remain with this company indefinitely” (reverse-scored), and “I often think about quitting my job at this company” ($\alpha = 0.71$).

Control Variables. To better assess the theoretical model, this study uses diverse information as control variables. As for the demographic traits of employees, this study considered age, gender (female = 0, male = 1), organizational tenure, job type (technician/engineer = 0, all others = 1), and group size as the control variables because they have been widely considered in past empirical work in LMX, OCBs, and performance (Vidyarthi et al., 2010). The average group size was 18.26 members. In addition, this study controlled previous work experience with other company as previous experience with an HRM system and the HRM attribution might have had a significant
relationship with the HR attribution with the current company. The variable for previous work experience was coded as a dummy variable (1) and 0 for no previous work experience.

Analysis Strategy

In theory, group leaders are implement HRM practices with his/her subordinates, and consequently subordinates in the same group develop similar HR attribution. Furthermore, research in LMX and RLMX has found that the constructs are influenced by certain group-level factors such as group size (Hu & Liden, 2013). To decide the appropriate level of the analysis for this model, between-group variance and within-group variance were needed. Thus, this study calculated Intraclass correlation coefficients ICC(1) to examine the mediators and outcome variables were influenced by a group-level predictor and to decide multi-level analysis was required (Bliese, 2000). ICC(1) provides information about whether the proportion of variance of the variable is caused by group membership. The results of ICC(1) for productivity oriented HR system was .03, and that of HR attribution for well-being was -.02, HR attribution for exploiting employees (ICC(1) = .00), HR attribution for cost reduction (ICC(1) = .05), LMX (ICC(1) = .11), OCBO (ICC(1) = .05), OCBS (ICC(1) = .11), turnover intention (ICC(1) = .08), and performance (ICC(1) = -.02) indicated that there was no statistical meaningful predictor in the group level except HR attribution for exploiting employees and LMX since the ICC(1)s were lower than 0.10 which is generally considered as the acceptable level of ICC(1; LeBreton & Senter, 2008; Murphy & Myors, 1998). The results of ICC(1)s provided mixed findings such that either single-level analyses (i.e., the individual level analyses) or group-level analyses could be appropriate. To test the
hypothesized model, this study, taking the multilevel nature of variables of interests (i.e., RLMX) and looking at some meaningful variances within and between groups, employed the multilevel analytic approach.

HLM 7 was used (Raudenbush, Bryk & Congdon, 2010) as the primary statistic program to conduct the multilevel tests of Hypotheses 1 through 4. All individual variables were group-centered and the group-level variable was grand-centered in this analytic process to reduce multicollinearity and to facilitate interpretations for the within and between group variances (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Furthermore, to test the relationships between HR attribution and performance, the ordinal HLM was performance since the performance data was a categorical variable.

The first set of HLM analyses was performed to examine the hypothesized moderating effects of LMX on the relationships between Productivity HR system (i.e., X) and HR attribution (i.e., Y) controlling for the effects of age, tenure, gender, job type, and previous work experience and group. Then, LMX and the interaction term of LMX and Productivity-based HRM were entered in order. The second set of HLM analyses was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships between HR attribution and employee outcomes and RLMX Entered in the HLM analyses were the interaction terms of HR attribution and RLMX. Further, to test the relationship between HR attribution and performance and the role of RLMX in that relationship, similar steps were conducted with ordinal HLM.
RESULTS

The means and standard deviations for the principle variables, and the correlations among the variables were presented in Table 2. The correlations among variables provide supports the theories and arguments of this research. This study predicted the productivity based HR system is positively related to both HR attribution for well-being and HR attribution for exploitation. The correlations showed that productivity oriented HR system is related to HR attribution of well-being positively \( (r = .78, \ p < .05) \), related to HR attribution of exploiting employees \( (r = .28, \ p < .05) \), but not significantly related to HR attribution of cost reduction \( (r = .06, \ n.s.) \). The correlations between HR attributions for well-being and OCBO and OCBS were consistent with the theories \( (r = .28, \ p < .05, \ & \ r = .35, \ p < .05 \text{ respectively}) \). The correlation between HR attribution for well-being and turnover intention was negative as expected \( (r = -.23, \ p < .05) \), but correlations with performance was not significant \( (r = .09, \ n.s.) \). Similarly, the correlations between HR attributions for exploiting employees between OCBO and OCBS were significant \( (r = .18, \ p < .05 \ & \ r = .21, \ p < .05) \), but it turned out that the HR attribution for exploiting employees were not correlated with performance and turnover intention \( (r = .05, \ n.s., \ r = -.07, \ n.s., \text{ respectively}) \). Similar patterns were found for the correlations between HR attribution for cost reduction, OCBO, OCBS, performance, and turnover intention. LMX was positively associated with HR attribution for well-being \( (r = .51, \ p < .05) \) while it was moderately related to HR attribution for exploiting employees \( (r = .20, \ p < .05) \) or not related to HR attribution for cost reduction \( (r = .03, \ n.s.) \).

RLMX and LMX correlation showed high positive correlations \( (r = .89, \ p < .05) \) and there would be a concern for multicollinearity between the two variables. Variable
computation from other variable would be one of the popular reason of multicollinearity between the two variables (i.e., the original variable and the computed variable from the original) Because RLMX is a variable computed from LMX and group average LMX, there might be the is multicollinearity between RLMX and LMX. Because of the nature of RLMX derived from LMX, this high level of LMX and RLMX correlation could be found in previous studies. For example, Henderson and colleagues (2008) showed 0.88 as the correlation between LMX and RLMX. Although the multicollinearity is observed in the data, it would not be a problem for this study because in the hypothesized model any relationship between RLMX and LMX was not predicted and thus were not tested. Therefore, testing multicollinearity in the analysis was not conducted in this study.

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Insert Table 2 about here
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**Hypothesis 1: The moderation effect of LMX on productivity HRM system and HR attribution.**

Hypothesis 1a anticipated that the positive relationship between Productivity-based HRM system and HR attribution for well-being is moderated by the degree of LMX, as such that high LMX strengthens the relationship. The HLM analysis results showed the positive relationship between HRM system and HR attribution for well-being ($\gamma_{60} = 1.01, p < .001$; Model 2 in Table 4) and the positive association of LMX with HR attribution for well-being ($\gamma_{70} = .12, p < .05$; Model 3 in Table 4), but the interaction term turned out non-significant ($\gamma_{80} = .07, n.s.$; Model 3 in Table 4). Consequently, Hypothesis 1a is not supported.
Hypothesis 1b proposed that the positive relationship between Productivity-based HRM system and HR attribution for exploitation is moderated by the degree of LMX, such that high LMX strengthens the relationship. The HLM analyses showed that HR productivity was positively related to HR attribution for exploiting employees ($\gamma_{60} = .26, p < .001$; Model 5 in Table 4), and LMX strengthened the Productivity-based HRM system – HR attribution for exploiting employees link ($\gamma_{80} = .14, p < .05$; Model 6 in Table 4) in contrast to the expectation. Further the interaction term did not strengthen the Productivity-based HRM system – HR attribution for cost reduction ($\gamma_{80} = .15, \text{n.s.}$; Model 9 in Table 3). Thus Hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Hypothesis 2: The Influences of RLMX on the relationships between Productivity-based HRM system and HR Attribution.

It is anticipated that the relationship between Productivity-based HRM system and HR attribution for well-being is contingent on and the level of RLMX in the Hypothesis 2a. In the HLM analyses, the positive influence of RLMX on HR attribution for well-being was shown ($\gamma_{70} = .12, p < .05$; Model 2 of Table 5), but there was no moderating influence of RLMX on Productivity-based HR system and HR attribution for well-being.
relationship ($\gamma_{80} = .05, n.s.;$ Model 3 of Table 5). Thus, hypothesis 2a was not supported. Also, the HLM results of examining the interaction of RLMX and HRM system on HR attribution for exploitation presented no evidence of moderating role of RLMX on the relationship between HR system and HR attribution for exploiting employees ($\gamma_{80} = .11, n.s.,$ Model 6 of Table 5). Similar result was shown for the moderation of RLMX for HR system and HR attribution for cost reduction ($\gamma_{80} = .12, n.s.,$ Model 9 of Table 5). Consequently, Hypothesis 2b and 2c were not supported.

Hypothesis 3: The Relationships between HR Attribution and OCBO, OCBS, Performance, and Turnover Intention.

The positive linkages between HR attribution for well-being and OCBO, OCBS, and performance and the negative link between HR attribution for well-being and turnover intention were anticipated in Hypothesis 3a. The HLM results presented that HR attribution of well-being increased OCBO ($\gamma_{60} = .17, p < .00,$ Model 1 of Table 6), OCBS ($\gamma_{60} = .27, p < .00;$ Model 1 of Table 7), and reduced turnover intention ($\gamma_{60} = -.25, p < .00,$ Model 1 of Table 8). However, HR attribution for well-being showed significant
but negative relationship with performance ($\gamma_{60} = -.29, p < .05, \text{Model 1 in Table 9}$). Thus Hypothesis 3a was partially supported.

On the other hands, hypothesis 3b was not supported by HLM analyses results.

By the theory, the negative relationship between HR attribution for exploitation and OCBO, OCBS, and performance, and the positive relationship between HR attribution for exploitation and turnover intention were anticipated, but the results provided significant but positive results. In regards to that the relationships, specifically the relationships between HR attribution for exploiting employees and OCBO ($\gamma_{70} = .13, p < .01, \text{Model 4 of Table 6}$), and OCBS was positive ($\gamma_{70} = .19, p < .00, \text{Model 4 of Table 7}$) in contrast to the expectations. Furthermore, the HR attribution for exploiting employees showed non signification relationship with turnover intention ($\gamma_{70} = -.02, n.s., \text{Model 4 of Table 8}$) and performance ($\gamma_{70} = -.05, n.s., \text{Model 4 of Table 9}$). Similarly, there was no significant relationship with HR attribution for cost reduction and OCBO, OCBS, turnover intention, and performance. In sum, hypothesis 3b was not supported.

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Insert Table 6, 7, 8, and 9 about here

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Hypothesis 4: The Moderating Role of RLMX on the relationships Between HR attribution and Employee Outcomes.

In Hypothesis 4a, the moderating role of RLMX on the positive relationships of HR attribution for well-being and OCBO, OCBS, and performance were proposed. As expected, the positive relationships between HR attribution for well-being and OCBO
and OCBS were stronger for those with high RLMX ($\gamma_{90} = .11, p < .00$, Model 3 in Table 6; $\gamma_{90} = .08, p < .05$, Model 3 of Table 7). In regards to performance, the interaction term of RLMX and HR attribution for well-being was significant and positive ($\gamma_{90} = .26, p < .00$, Model 3 of Table 9) as expected. In sum, Hypothesis 4a was supported.

Hypothesis 4b suggested that the negative relationships between HR attribution for exploiting employees and OCBO, OCBS, and performance are contingent on the degree of RLMX. The results of regression analyses failed to support the hypotheses as none of the interaction term showed significant relationships (Model 6 and 9 of Table 6 and Table 7). Further ordinal HLM results indicated non-significant relationship between HR system of exploiting employees and performance on the contingent of RLMX (Model 6 and 9 of Table 9). Thus, hypothesis 4b was not supported.

Further, RLMX was anticipated to moderate the negative relationship between HR attribution for well-being and turnover intention as noted in hypothesis 4c. Also, the positive association of HR attribution for exploiting employees with turnover intention is moderated by RLMX in hypothesis 4d. The results presented in Table 8 showed that there was no moderating effect of RLMX on HR attribution – turnover intention relationship ($\gamma_{90} = .05, n.s.,$ Model 3; $\gamma_{100} = .02, n.s.,$ Model 6; $\gamma_{110} = -.03, n.s.,$ Model 9) and the results thus failed to support the hypothesis 4c and 4d.

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Insert Figure 4 & 5 about here

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DISCUSSION

Scholars and practitioners have recognized the importance of human capital as a source for competitive advantage among companies. Such recognition has given rise to increasing demands to explore ways to manage human capital effectively (Grant, 1996; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Responding to these demands, more research has been conducted in the human resource management area and by the virtue of scholars’ endeavors, many theoretical and empirical findings have been presented in the literature on HRM (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014). Among the many of topics in HRM literature, recently employees’ experience with HRM practices have been receiving a good deal of scholarly attention (Sanders et al., 2015). As a response to the recent HRM research needs, this study has investigated the factors that influence employees’ HRM experience in a group setting. Especially, building on HR attribution arguments, the study examined, as the critical factor that shapes employee HR experience, the quality work relationship between a leader and a subordinate.

The HLM results showed variances in employees’ HR attribution. The results presented that an HRM system (i.e., productivity-oriented HRM system in this study) was positively and significantly related to both HR attribution for well-being and HR attribution for exploiting employees, but not related to HR attribution for cost reduction. The results suggest that given the same HRM system, employees develop different HR attribution perceptions. The non-significant relationship between an HRM system and HR attribution for cost reduction might be caused by a lack of variation in employees’ ratings. When the study compared the means of each type of employee HR attribution rating by HRM rating groups (employees were placed into one of three groups based on
their ratings of productivity oriented HRM system: high, mid, and low group), the HR attribution for well-being and exploiting employees showed significant mean differences across all three groups of HRM system, but there was no significant differences in means for the HR attribution for cost reduction. This suggests that for this company, striving to reduce cost is required of every employee regardless of their job, position, job level, or HRM system to which they are subject. Thus, there might not be much variance in the rating of HR attribution for cost reduction among employees.

In addition, the findings show that LMX was directly associated with employee HR attribution for well-being, but this association of LMX with HR attribution as non-significant if the HR attribution was for exploiting employees and cost reduction. This implies that LMX only helps employees develop a positive perception about an HRM system, and it is unrelated to the negative perception about HRM system. The absence of LMX influence on employee HR attribution for exploitation might be explained by attributional arguments of leadership. Some of the leadership and LMX studies have noted that leadership has been considered a political process; employees would like to attribute negative events with leadership to the issues in organizational environments rather than to matters associated with the leader (Davis & Gardner, 2004). In other words, employees may separate leaders from organization when they have negative and undesirable HRM events in the organization, and they would like to attribute the problem to the organization rather than to their particular leader. Because of that, there might be no relationship between LMX and HR attribution for exploitation.

The moderating effects of RLMX and its interaction with a productivity-oriented HRM system were mostly non-significant or showed a trend opposite the direction of
anticipated relationships. The reason for such findings may pertain to the role of RLMX. In this study, RLMX was employed only as a moderator, and the HLM results consistently showed that RLMX played a role of independent variables and the effect was strong enough to receive attention. Further the relationship between RLMX and HR attribution was significant only when the type of HR attribution was for well-being. As noted above, this finding also implies that employees would more likely separate their relationship with the leader than with the organization. Because of that, regardless of the presence of a productivity-oriented HRM system, RLMX solely operated in shaping HR attribution for well-being, but was not related with HR attribution of exploitation. In addition, it might be due to the lack of representativeness of RLMX, as not all group members provided information about LMX.

The patterns of influences of HR attribution on employees’ OCBO, OCBS, performance, and turnover intention indicate that HR attribution for well-being results in outcomes comparable to other HR attribution perceptions. Beside the role of HR attribution for well-being, the findings of HR attribution for exploitation, especially those of HR attribution for cost reduction, yielded interesting information. For example, the positive association of HR attribution for cost reduction on OCBO was unexpected, yet its pattern might make sense according to attribution theory. Attribution theory (Heider, 1958) explains that people would like to develop negative feelings toward an object when a negative experience with the object (e.g., behavior) is attributed to the object’s fault. However, people would not have adverse feelings toward the object when they think the object’s behavior is caused by an outside factor. Employees in an organization might think that a cost-reduction policy pursued by the organization is pushed for financial and
strategical reasons. Consequently, they would develop desires to help the company and this may increase citizenship behavior toward the organization. The attribution argument also supports the EFA and CFA results of HR attribution for exploitation. The HR attribution for exploitation would be considered the company’s fault (internal attribution), but the HR attribution for cost reduction would be perceived as an external influence that the company has to follow (external attribution). Furthermore, for this company, cost reduction would be the norm for everyone. As noted earlier, the company examined in this study had long espoused the importance of saving costs and increasing efficiency.

Hence, HR attribution for cost reduction would not be associated with HR exploiting employees. Also, the variances in this construct among employees would not be enough to detect statistical information. Thus, the two constructs were loaded on different factors. This argument provides supports to finding the positive association of HR attribution for exploiting employees and turnover intention as well. Also inconsistent with the proposed arguments were the non-significant relationships between HR attribution and performance. However, this may indicate that employees with an HR attribution for exploitation at least meet the performance requirements.

Finally, the results about the influences of RLMX on OCBO and OCBS showed different patterns for HR attribution for well-being and HR attribution for exploitation. According to the HLM results, the positive links between HR attribution for well-being and OCBO and OCBS were strengthened when RLMX entered the regression equations as a moderator. This might imply that people have stronger motivation to conduct helping behavior when they have good relationships with leader compared to others and feel the organization has been favorable to them. This case would make sense considering the
subordinates’ desire to restore and develop better relationship with leaders. Studies in LMX and citizenship behavior have noted that when a subordinate has low LMX, they are more likely to do OCB or impression management behavior to enhance the work relationship with leader (Wayne & Green, 1993; Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008). It is expected that the desire to hold high LMX is stronger when the organization is more favorable, as the subordinate would want to stay with the organization longer.

On the other hand, for the HR attribution for exploitation and OCBO and OCBO relationships, RLMX didn’t play a moderating role in the relationships, but had direct and positive influences on OCBO and OCBS. These results may imply that when employees experience negative aspects of an organization, they tend to separate their leaders (especially when they have good relationship with the leaders) from the organization, and the influence of LMX and HR attribution on outcome variables would not overlap. As seen in Models 1, 2, 4, and 5 of Tables 6 and 7, the effects of HR attribution for employee well-being on OCBO and OCBS dropped significantly and, when RLMX entered the regression equation, even became non-significant. On the other hand, the influences of HR attribution of exploiting employees on OCBO and OCBS dropped, but not as much as the cases of HR attribution of well-being. Their effects were still significant. The patterns found in these results suggest that the influence of LMX and RLMX on employees’ outcomes are contingent on how they perceive their management practices. In other words, the perception may create certain conditions for LMX and RLMX operations.

A summary of findings and results is presented in Table 10.
Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study’s primary contribution is its providing of a systematic understanding of the process of employees HR attribution perception. Scholars have widely noted the need to focus on employees’ cognition to examine the real effectiveness of an HRM system. Despite the theoretical and empirical needs for study that examines how employees create certain perceptions about an HRM system, there have been few studies that tested the mechanism of how HR perception emerges. Although scholars in HR experience and perception have noted the importance of social factors on HR experience and creation of employee HR perception (Nishii, et al., 2008), little research has been conducted to identify what social factors impact employee HR experience. Aiming at expanding the current understanding of HR experience; this research theoretically investigates the process mechanisms by incorporating a social factor which is the work quality relationship between subordinate and leader. This study employed LMX as that factor, which is in line with the leadership literature that emphasizes the critical role of a leader on follower’s experience in the workplace (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hoobler & Hu, 2013; Scandura & Graen, 1984). Having employed LMX, this research offers the insight that LMX may enhance employees’ positive experience with HR in an organization. This in turn contributes to the generation of positive HR attribution for well-being. Further, the findings of this study show that the positive impact of LMX on employees’ HR attribution exists only when an employee makes a positive attribution about the HRM
system positively and it provides further insight and theoretical implication to literature about complex dynamic relationship between HRM system and LMX.

The results of RLMX also help to expand our understanding of the mechanism of how HR attribution generates employees’ positive behavior. Many studies assume the positive variable is related to positive outcomes while the negative variable is associated with negative outcomes. This assumption was made in Nishii and colleagues’ work (2008). They explained that positive HR attribution would create positive attitudes, which are in turn positively related with overall employee in helping behavior at the group level. Their findings were interesting and did in fact make a lot of sense. However, by looking at the unit-level outcomes of OCB, they missed the information about how individual employees respond to HR attribution. Overcoming this limitation, this study showed, at the individual level, a more complex mechanism associated with HR attribution, LMX, and OCB. It showed that people still performed helping behaviors, possibly out of a desire to restore a positive relationship with the organization. Furthermore, the intention of doing OCB became stronger when the employee held relatively good relationship with leader compared to others’ LMX. The positive moderation of RLMX was realized only when the employee had HR attribution of well-being. These findings suggest that employees want to expend efforts to develop a better relationship with the organization or supervisor when they have a positive experience with either the organization or supervisor. Thus, the influence of HR attribution on OCB toward organization and supervisor may not simply be inferred by HR attribution, but depends on the influence of LMX. By showing these results, which stress the important role of LMX in HR operation, this research adds theoretical arguments to the literature.
Finally, this study contributes to HR literature by introducing social comparison theory to explain the HR system operation mechanism. Social comparison theory, currently popular among management, is an important theory that explains many of social phenomena in an organization (Ashforth, 1985). Many research areas such as justice, equity, social network, social identity, social information process, and compensation are the popular topics that use social comparison theory as the foundation of their arguments. Despite this popularity, few studies in strategic HRM research have utilized it. This study shows the benefits for scholars of employing social comparison theory in testing the HRM operation. For example, social comparison theory in this study helped illustrate what consequences would be created when employees in the same group or organization are given different types of HRM systems. In emphasizing the usefulness of social comparison theory, this study hopes to serve the development of strategic HRM research.

This study offers a couple of implications for practitioners. Most importantly, this study suggests that the work relationship between leader and members is a critical factor that influences on employees’ cognition, even employees perception of HR system. The findings of this study showed a positive association between LMX and HR attribution for well-being and a negative association between LMX and HR attribution for exploitation. The implication of this finding is that ensuring employees’ quality relationship with leaders results in benefits for the company. Further, the variability in LMX within a group would be detrimental for HR management as it makes employees perceive the HR system as being less about employees’ well-being. Thus reducing the variability in LMX within a group may increase the effectiveness of HRM system operation.
Second, this study suggests that to maximize the effectiveness of an HRM system a company needs to manage the factors that influence employees’ perceptions. The evidence of this study shows that social factors (i.e., LMX and RLMX) played more critical roles in shaping employees’ HR attribution than did the impact of the HRM system. Taking into consideration the role of an HRM system in a company’s goal achievement, the company would prefer to have a strong HRM system that creates among employees congruence in perceptions of the organization. If the HRM system doesn’t function as expected, the company cannot expect consistent outcomes from employees, and it is likely to fail to properly manage its people. Thus, this study suggests organizations need to focus on developing strong HRM systems that allow the minimizing of the individual and social factors and the maximizing of the impacts of HRM system on employees’ cognition.

**Limitations and Suggestions**

This study is not without limitations. First, its cross-section design limits the findings and implications of causality among variables. For example, the influence of the organization and social factors (i.e., HRM system and LMX in this study) on the development of HR attribution is assumed. With the cross-sectional data, however, it cannot be inferred that higher LMX creates higher HR attribution of well-being perception while it reduces HR attribution of exploitation. Consequently, any conclusion of causality should be held until the relationships are tested with longitudinal data.

Second, the sample was collected from a single company operating in the construction industry. As the information provided by the sample is limited to a specific
setting, the sample might cause biased information about employees’ HR experience and perception, social relationship, behavior, and performance, all of which could be distinctive to specific settings. The company examined was huge (more than 3,000 employees). It holds various types of jobs and positions such as IT, sales, management, technicians, and engineers. Almost one-third of employees responded to this survey and they were working in various jobs at various levels. Thus, the findings might be influenced by the unique characteristics of the company. Nonetheless, future research is needed to confirm the generalizability of this study and to extend the findings presented in this study.

Third, this study examined as the social factors only the leader and member exchange. It ignored other social factors such as team-member exchange relationship, network, and/or inside and outside mentors. The social environment that an individual employee has is very complicated with multiple social actors. The number of social actors is not the only consideration. A study should also consider the relationships among the social actors in the social context (Methot, LePine, Podsakoff, & Christian, 2016; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). Therefore, generalizing about the effects of social factors might be problematic. To expand the findings and contribute to the literature in HR and organizational behavior, further investigation is needed regarding the role of social actors in HRM experiences.

Fourth, this study could not test or control individual’s cognitive process or the factors that influence on individual’s cognitive process. Research in social cognition has mentioned that individual’s cognition process is complex and not decided by a single or even a few factors (Fiske, 1993). Further, it has been illustrated that not only social
factors but also an individual’s personal background such as education and previous experiences shape the individual’s cognition (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). To test what creates employees perception about HRM system, consequently, requires exploration of individual’s personal history. This study controlled for the previous work experience at another company, but the information delivered by the dummy variable of work history was limited. Future research should consider the factors that reside in each individual to clarify the influences of social factors and organizational factors on individual employees’ perception.

Fifth, more investigation is needed on the structure of HR attribution for exploitation. Nishii and colleagues (2008) showed that one factor was the structure of HR attribution for exploitation, but the findings of this study showed there might be two factors. Further theoretical and empirical evidence is needed for developing a theory of HR attribution.

Finally, there are statistical concerns in the sample. Most of the variables tested in this study were rated by individuals. Thus it is not free from response bias. Also, the findings for Hypothesis 4b showed a potential suppression problem with RLMX and HR attribution for exploitation. In addition, RLMX would be better assessed when it is calculated with the polynomial regression technique according to recent arguments in RLMX literature (Hu & Liden, 2013). The current study did not employ the Polynomial technique since the ICC(1) showed that there would be no group level influences on the proposed relationships and confirmed the single-level analysis for the model, but still the Polynomial technique benefits scholars with robust findings. It is suggested that future
research consider employing multiple raters for different variables of interests, and test
the relationships of the variables using advanced statistical methods and techniques.
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Wright, P.M., & Nishii, L.H. 2013. Strategic HRM and organizational behavior: Integrating multiple levels of analysis. In D. Guest, J. Paauwe, & P. Wright,


FIGURE 1

A Theoretical Framework

LMX

Productivity-Oriented HRM System

RLMX

HR Attribution of Well-Being

HR Attribution of Exploitation

OCB-O

OCB-S

In-role Performance

Turnover Intentions
FIGURE 2

The Effects of Interaction of Productivity-Based HRM System and LMX on HR Attribution for Exploiting Employees
FIGURE 3
The Effects of Interaction of HR Attribution for Well-being and RLMX on OCBO
FIGURE 4

The Effects of Interaction of HR Attribution for Well-being and RLMX on OCBS
FIGURE 5

The Effects of Interaction of HR Attribution for Well-being and RLMX on Job Performance
## TABLE 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis for HR Attribution

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<td>- Exploitation</td>
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<td>- Exploiting employee</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Quality</td>
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<td>- Cost</td>
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<td>- Exploiting employees</td>
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**TABLE 2**

Principle Component Analysis for HR Attribution for Cost Reduction and for Exploiting Employees

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<td>Benefit: HR Attribution for exploiting Employees</td>
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<td>Schedule: HR Attribution for Exploiting Employees</td>
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<td>Training/Development: HR Attribution for Exploiting employees</td>
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### TABLE 3

Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities of Measures

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<td>.06</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
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<td>7 LMX(^a)</td>
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<td>12 OCBO(^f)</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
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**Group Level**

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</table>

Note. \(a=\) Leader member exchange \(b=\) Relative leader member exchange, \(c=\) HR attribution for well-being, \(d=\) HR attribution for exploiting employees, \(e=\) HR attribution for cost reduction, \(f=\) organizational citizenship behavior toward organization, \(g=\) organizational citizenship behavior toward supervisor; 
\(\ast p<.05; \ast\ast p<.01\)
## TABLE 4
HLM Results for the Moderating Role of LMX in the Relationships Between Productivity-based HRM System and HR Attributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>HR Attribution for Cost Reduction</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M1</td>
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<td>M3</td>
</tr>
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<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure, ( \gamma_{20} )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender, ( \gamma_{30} )</td>
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<td>-.22*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job type, ( \gamma_{40} )</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work experience, ( \gamma_{50} )</td>
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<td>.16*</td>
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<td>Group size, ( \gamma_{01} )</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>PHRM, ( \gamma_{60} )</td>
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<td>.97 ***</td>
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<td>LMX, ( \gamma_{70} )</td>
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<td>.12 ***</td>
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<td>PHRM x LMX, ( \gamma_{80} )</td>
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<td>( R^2_{total} )</td>
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<td>( \delta R^2_{total} )</td>
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Note. PHRM=Productivity-based HRM system, LMX=leader–member exchange;
a: \( R^2_{total} \) is calculated based on the formula suggested by Snijders and Bosker (1999)

* \( p<.05 \); ** \( p<.01 \); *** \( p<.001 \)
### TABLE 5
HLM Results for the Moderating Role of RLMX in the Relationships Between Productivity-based HRM System and HR Attributions

<table>
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<td>RLMX, (\gamma_{70})</td>
<td>.12 *</td>
<td>.12 **</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHRM×RLMX, (\gamma_{80})</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>(R^2_{\text{total}})</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\delta R^2_{\text{total}})</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.00</td>
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Note. PHRM = Productivity-based HRM system, RLMX = Relative leader–member exchange;  
\(R^2_{\text{total}}\) is calculated based on the formula suggested by Snijders and Bosker (1999).  
* \(p<.05\); ** \(p<.01\); *** \(p<.001\)
TABLE 6
HLM Results for the Relationships of HR Attribution and OCBO and Moderating Role of RLMX in the Relationships

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Tenure, $\gamma_{20}$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender, $\gamma_{30}$</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job type, $\gamma_{40}$</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience, $\gamma_{50}$</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group size, $\gamma_{60}$</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR ATT WB, $\gamma_{70}$</td>
<td>.17  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR ATT EXP, $\gamma_{80}$</td>
<td>.13  **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLMX</td>
<td>.22  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR ATT WB×RLMX, $\gamma_{90}$</td>
<td>.11  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR ATT EXP×RLMX, $\gamma_{100}$</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR ATT COST×RLMX, $\gamma_{110}$</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2_{total} \ a$ = .11  .17  .18  .07  .16  .18  .07  .17  .19
$\delta R^2_{total}$ = .06  .01  .09  .02  .10  .02

Note. OCBO=organizational citizenship behavior toward organization. OCBS=organizational citizenship behavior toward supervisor. HR ATT WB=HR attribution for well-being, HR ATT EXP=HR attribution for exploiting employees, HR ATT COST=HR attribution for cost reduction;
* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$
### TABLE 7
HLM Results for the Relationships of HR Attribution and OCBS and Moderating Role of RLMX in the Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<th>M7</th>
<th>M8</th>
<th>M9</th>
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<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
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<td>**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>.06</td>
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<td>***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>HR ATT COST, $\gamma_{80}$</td>
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<td>.46</td>
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<td>.50</td>
<td>***</td>
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<td>HR ATT WB×RLMX, $\gamma_{90}$</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR ATT COST×RLMX, $\gamma_{110}$</td>
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$\hat{R}^2$ total

<table>
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<th>M4</th>
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<td>.37</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.37</td>
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</table>

Note. PHRM=Productivity-based HRM system, RLMX = Relative leader–member exchange, HR ATT WB=HR attribution for well-being, HR ATT EXP=HR attribution for exploiting employees, HR ATT COST=HR attribution for cost reduction;

- $\hat{R}^2$ is calculated based on the formula suggested by Snijders and Bosker (1999)
- * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$
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<th>M7</th>
<th>M8</th>
<th>M9</th>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
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<td>Tenure, $\gamma_{20}$</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.00</td>
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<td>Gender, $\gamma_{30}$</td>
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<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
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<td>-.38**</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PHRM=Productivity-based HRM system, RLMX = Relative leader–member exchange, HR ATT WB=HR attribution for well-being, HR ATT EXP=HR attribution for exploiting employees, HR ATT COST=HR attribution for cost reduction; 

$a$: $R^2_{total}$ is calculated based on the formula suggested by Snijders and Bosker (1999)

*p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M1</th>
<th>M2</th>
<th>M3</th>
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<td>0.52**</td>
<td>0.54**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td>0.47**</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Thresholds

| $\delta_3$ | 3.09***| 3.17***| 3.18***| 3.10***| 3.22***| 3.26***| 3.12***| 3.21***| 3.21***|
| $\delta_4$ | 4.70***| 4.81***| 4.85***| 4.72***| 4.91***| 4.99***| 4.75***| 4.89***| 4.909***|
| Level 2 variance, $\tau_{60}$ | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.05 | 0.05 |

Note. PHRM=Productivity-based HRM system, RLMX = Relative leader–member exchange, HR ATT WB=HR attribution for well-being, HR ATT EXP=HR attribution for exploiting employees, HR ATT COST=HR attribution for cost reduction; * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$
### TABLE 10

A Summary of Hypotheses Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tr>
<td>H1a: LMX moderates the positive relationship between Productivity-based</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRM system and employee HR attribution for well-being, such that high</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX strengthens the relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: LMX moderates the positive relationship between Productivity-based</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRM system and employee HR attribution for exploitation, such that high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX weakens the relationships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a: The positive relationship between a Productivity-based HRM system</td>
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<td>and HR attribution of well-being is contingent on RLMX, such that the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship is stronger for those with high RLMX.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b: The positive relationship between a Productivity-based HRM system</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and HR attribution of exploitation is contingent on RLMX, such that the</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship is weaker for those with high RLMX.</td>
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<tr>
<td>H3a: HR attribution for well-being is positively related to employees’</td>
<td>Partially supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCBO, OCBS, and performance, and negatively related to turnover intention.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b: HR attribution for exploitation is negatively related to employee</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCBO, OCBS, and performance, and positively related to turnover intention.</td>
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<td>H4a: The relationships between HR attribution for well-being and employee</td>
<td>Supported</td>
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<td>OCBO, OCBS, and performance are contingent on RLMX, such that the positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>relationship between HR attribution for well-being and OCBO, OCBS, and</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance are stronger for those with high RLMX.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>H4b: The relationships between HR attribution for exploitation and employee</td>
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<td>OCBO, OCBS, and performance are contingent on RLMX, such that the negative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship between HR attribution for exploitation and OCBO, OCBS, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>performance are weaker for those with low RLMX.</td>
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<td>H4c: The relationships between HR attribution for well-being and employee</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>is stronger for those with low RLMX.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>H4d: The relationships between HR attribution for exploitation and employee</td>
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<td>and turnover intention are contingent on RLM, such that the positive</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>intention is stronger for those with low RLMX.</td>
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