



EVOLUTIONARY TENDENCIES OF SIMPLE SOCIAL EXCHANGE ACROSS THE STAGES OF EGO DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This paper addresses the research question of how the stages of ego development impact the interpretation schemes of the simple social exchange (act of giving). Using a sample of N = 290 respondents, we present the research findings on the evolution of the interpretation schemes of the act of giving across the levels of ego development. Research findings reveal the tendency of the stage of ego development to impact the properties and effects of the simple social exchange (act of giving). We theorize implications for leadership. We propose that the higher order of ego development induces a higher quality leader–member exchange (LMX) and greater likelihood of resolution of adaptive leadership challenges. Furthermore, followers are more likely to entrust power to a leader in exchange for high-quality relationships. The paper is a tentative attempt of merger of the LMX theory with the constructive school of adult development. This merger illuminates an interesting relation, namely that the stage of ego development might be a likely determinant of the quality of the LMX and leadership effectiveness.

Keywords: ego development, LMX theory, generativity, act of giving, social exchange

1 INTRODUCTION

In leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, leadership is a function of the quality of the leader–member interaction; dynamics of this interaction construct the quality of the social exchange. Predictors of high-quality social exchange have been identified on the side of the leader (charisma), on the side of the follower (follower innovative role expectations) (Meindl, Erlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Hollander, 1980), and in the dyadic leadership relationship (LMX) (Hollander, 1980; Graen & Scandura, 1987). One of the predictors of the quality of the social exchange is demographic and relational similarity (Green, Anderson, & Shivers, 1996; Tsui, Xin, & Egan, 1995); both similarities increase the likelihood of trust in the relationship (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008; Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009). Trust is a higher-order attribute of high-quality social exchange.

Trust also is a function of perceptions and interpretations of the both sides of the relationship; thus,

in leader–members social exchange, a followers' perceptions and interpretations also are highly important for the trust and high-quality social exchange (Hollander, 1978, 2009). "Changes can occur in perception, when enriched by experience. The prospect for trust or mistrust may thereby grow. If positive, there will likely be loyalty and solidarity of purpose, and the reverse is also likely. Trust and loyalty are among those qualities needed to bind relationships" (Hollander, 2009: 5).

The purpose of this paper is to understand how trust is formed between two people in the social exchange while being impacted by stages of ego development. Because both (1) the stage of ego development (Loevinger, 1976) and (2) the quality of social exchange are complex phenomena, the impact of stage of ego development of the quality of social exchange thus is a higher-order complex phenomenon. To uncover the basic regularities of this impact between two complex phenomena, we focus on the most elementary form of the social exchange, "the act of giving."

The act of giving is worthy of study for several reasons: (1) it is the action/behavioral expression of the personal tendency for generativity (Erikson, 1950; Fein, 2018;); (2) generativity depends on the stage of adult development (Erikson, 1950, 1959, 1963); (3) generativity might be a possible explanatory variable of a leader's capacity for integrating across difference interests and expectations (Volckmann, 2014) and to resolve the adaptive leadership challenges (Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009).

The paper contributes to the field of LMX theory. It gives a new perspective on LMX theory by merging the neo-Piagetian school of adult development with LMX theory. Furthermore, this paper brings the new concept to the field of trust formation, namely generativity viewed from the perspective of a simple act of social exchange—i.e., how the act of giving contributes to trust formation in the LMX relationship. Thirdly, the paper explains the trust formation in the LMX relationship from the perspective of the leader and the perspective of the follower.

This paper is organized in eight sections. The second section reviews properties of ego development as identified by the constructive neo-Piagetian school of adult development. The third section focuses on the Eriksonian view of adult development, the phenomenon of generativity, and research on the act of giving. The fourth section presents the research design, followed by how the perception and interpretations of the act of giving evolve across the ego development stages. We apply the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) ego development decoding scheme and the grounded theory approach to identify properties of the act of giving at the given ego development stage (sample size $N = 290$ respondents). In the sixth section we speculate on the possible influence of ego development stage on the trust aspect of a simple social exchange (in our case, represented by the act of giving). We propose a tentative framework of co-fluence (Hollander's abbreviated expression for the two-side influence or collective influence) from the two perspectives of the leader–follower relationship: (1) the follower perspective—how the willingness to entrust power to another person in exchange for services (the follower perspective) might evolve as one moves across the stages of ego

development; and (2) the leader perspective—how the willingness of a leader to address the adaptive challenges might evolve as one moves across the stages of ego development. The seventh section discusses theoretical contributions, practical implications, research limitations, and possibilities for future research. The last section summarizes the main findings.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Adult (Ego) Development

The neo-Piagetian constructive school of human development studies different evolutionary tendencies in humans such as self-referential and meaning-making systems (Kegan, 1982, 1994), social cognition (Selman, 1971, 1980), reflective judgment (King & Kitchener, 2004), moral judgment (Kohlberg, 1984), the structure of the ego (Loevinger, 1976; Hy & Loevinger, 1996), cognitive complexity (Commons, Trudeau, Stein, Richards, & Krause, 1998), the complexity of perspective-taking and the affective sensitivity (Cook-Greuter, 1985/revised 2013; 2000), action logics (Tolbert & Associates, 2004; Rooke & Tolbert, 2005), leadership styles (Harris & Kuhnert, 2008), needs and motivations (Maslow, 1967; Barret, 2016), and dominant subconscious values and beliefs (Graves, 1974; Beck & Cowan, 1996).

Regardless of the foci of the studies, neo-Piagetian scholars have identified the following evolutionary regularities in human/leader development (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, & Baker, 2006):

- 1) People try to make sense of themselves by forming meaningful and coherent narratives around the experience (Bauer & McAdams, 2004).
- 2) The story and experience interpretation is dependent of the subject–object relationship and meaning-making mechanisms (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2009). Subject–object relationships and the meaning-making mechanisms evolve.
- 3) The meaning-making mechanisms evolve in stages, referred to as orders of consciousness, ways of knowing, or orders of development (McCauley et al., 2006).

The stages of development unfold in a specific invariant sequence, with each successive order transcending and including the previous order (Wilber, 1995/2001). Erikson (1950, 1959, 1963) constructed eight core polarities operating in the human psyche that need to be resolved in the process of human (ego) development. These are trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. doubt/shame, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. identity diffusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair; these polarities construct an eight-stage model of adult development. In the case of ideal development, the person proceeds successively through these stages.

From the perspective of the leadership and sustainability, the most interesting opposition is generativity vs. stagnation (Ghislieri & Gatti, 2012). Generativity “is meant to include . . . productivity and creativity” (Erikson, 1950, p. 267). In the original Eriksonian notion of generativity, the emphasis is on the intergenerational inclusion; however, the personal tendency for inclusion also could be applied across all other social and business divides, and thus is critical for integral leadership (Volckman, 2014).

Slater (2003) added to Erikson’s stage of conflict between generativity vs. stagnation by including seven psychosocial conflicts, namely inclusivity vs. exclusivity, pride vs. embarrassment, responsibility vs. ambivalence, career productivity vs. inadequacy, parenthood vs. self-absorption, being needed vs. alienation, and honesty vs. denial. Some of Erikson’s most compelling examples of generativity appear in his psychobiographical explorations of the lives of Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi, two great leaders, both of whom appear to have been their most generative in the bright light of public action rather than in the private realms of friends and family. Generativity as a stage of adult development is affected by family background and cultural background (Pratt, Matsuba, Lawford, & Villar, 2020).

2.2 Generativity and the Act of Giving

McAdams and de St Aubin (1992) studied the phenomena of generativity from a wider perspective—how a shared psychosocial space impacts the expression of the generativity, inclusion, and ten-

dency for giving. They identified a seven-feature conceptual model operating within a shared psychosocial space that induces the generative action: (1) cultural demands for generativity and acts of giving; (2) wish, desire, and the force in the human psyche for generativity; (3) the power of the concern for the next generation (the narrow Eriksonian view of generativity); (4) a personal belief in the goodness of oneself; (5) implemented generative action and its consequences; (6) a virtuous loop in which the generative action is strengthened further by cultural demand or inner desire; and (7) a person’s narration of generative action into the coherent subjective story about the self. Bradley (1997) and Bradley & Marcia (1998) studied the resolution of generativity vs. stagnation from the perspective of ego-identity structure. They found that the resolution of the conflict is dependent upon the capacity of the individual to synthesize the care with receptivity. Two criteria determine the extent of care or receptivity: (1) an individual’s level of involvement, defined as the active concern for the growth of the self and others; and (2) an individual’s inclusivity and scope of caregiving concern. Adults can rate high or low on these two criteria in relation to self and others. These ratings allow adults to be classified into five identity statuses: generative, agentic, communal, conventional, and stagnant. Bradley and Marcia (1998) also showed that expression of generativity and the five identity statuses tends to be a property of the higher-order stages of ego development, which they measured using the WUSCT (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

Generativity is a personality trait (placed in the upper left quadrant of the Wilberian all quadrants, all levels [AQAL] model), whereas the act of giving is the behavior expressed in a specific moment in time and context (placed in upper right quadrant of Wilberian AQAL integral theory; Wilber, 1995/2001). In the research literature, the act of giving is defined as “freely offering something of oneself to another person, which needs to be of value to the recipient without the expectation of receiving anything in return” (Knight, Skouteris, Townsend, & Hooley, 2014, p. 258). Such a definition conceals the unexpected nature of returns for the giver; for that matter, Knight et al. (2014) question whether the unexpected nature of

returns is truly unexpected due to hidden benefits for the giver, and thus the act of giving is inherently a two-way social exchange in nature.

A meta-research review of the act of giving within the context of non-familial reciprocal inter-generational interaction implied positive behavioral change on both sides of the social exchange (Knight et al., 2014). Furthermore, for both sides in the relationship, the act of giving causes positive emotional states (Morrow-Howell, Hong, & Tang, 2009), improved self-esteem, increased meaning, and purpose in one's life (Folts, 2006; Hegeman, Roodin, Gilliland, & Ó'Flathabháin, 2010; Reisig & Fees, 2007; Rozario, 2006). Furthermore, the act of giving increases proximity within relational links (Lohman, Griffiths, Coppard, & Cota, 2003); increases social cohesion across generations (De Souza, 2007); and increases affective and instrumental reciprocity (Breytspraak, Arnold, & Hogan, 2008). The effects of the act of giving are influenced by personal values (Cruz Passos, Silva Leite & Rezende Pinto, 2020), which evolve through stages of adult development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Question

The research question is how trust is formed between two people in the social exchange while being impacted by stages of adult or ego development. The social exchange was studied in terms of the act of giving. What are the regularities of the act of giving across stages of adult development? After the identification of regularities, what are the implications for the LMX relationship, from the perspective of a leader and of a follower?

3.2 Research Setting and Data Gathering

We used convenience sampling strategy (Robinson, 2014). Data were gathered over the period December 2018–December 2020 from the Slovenian adult population (aged above 18 years). The request first was sent to post-graduate students at the University of Ljubljana, who were asked to disseminate it among their private network in which also more senior people are repre-

sented. To increase motivation for taking the test, all respondents were offered the opportunity to receive written coaching feedback on the dominant adult developmental stage. In that case, the person needed to reveal his/her email address. Otherwise, the person could stay anonymous. The WUSCT was conducted in Slovene.

3.3 Method

We used a questionnaire composed of three sections: (1) an ego development section; (2) interpretations of the act of giving; and (3) the socio-demographic of the respondent.

For the ego development stage, we adopted Loevinger's abbreviated sentence completion test (WUSCT), composed of 18 stem roots (Raising a family...; Being with other people...; My thoughts...; What gets me into trouble is...; Education...; When people are helpless...; A man's job is...; I feel sorry...; Rules are...; I can't stand people who...; I am...; My main problem is ...; My emotions...; A good mother...; My conscience bothers me...; A man (women) should always...; The meaning of life is...; and Happiness is...). We identified the stages by decoding using the guidelines in the WUSCT decoding manual (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Decoding was done by two decoders, both of whom were experts in the field of a constructive approach to adult development with experience in the WUSCT decoding procedure. Cohen's kappa is above 98.2%, indicating good inter-rater reliability (Figure A-1).

Answers on the reflective question "Reflecting on your personal experience, please share with us what are the expected and unexpected consequences of act of giving?" We deliberately left the act of giving undefined, thus inviting respondents to apply their own interpretations to "the act of giving." This aligned with the philosophy of the sentence completion test, in which the choice of approach and interpretation is an important variable of the research observation. These answers were decoded using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). We grouped people in subgroups according to their stage of ego development identified through the WUSCT scheme.

For more-effective pattern recognition, we also extracted the generic ego properties at each developmental stage (Hy & Loevinger, 1996). Generic ego properties in each stage presented thematic lenses through which we observed answers. We paid attention to the material/non-material aspects, positive/negative, affective/cognitive aspects, and self/other/relational aspects of answers at each adult stage. Figure A-2 summarizes how these properties across the stages of adult development were identified.

3.4 Sample Characteristics

The sample totalled 290 individuals who completed the SCT and shared their interpretations of the act of giving. The ego development stages ranged from E2 (impulsive) to E7 (individualistic). Figure 1 summarizes the socio-economic features of the sample. A majority of the sampled cases occupied the E4 stage of ego development (59.7%), followed by the E5 stage of ego development (19.7%). The post-conventional stage (E7) was weakly represented in the sample. The sample shows that people who occupy higher stages of ego development are on average older, which confirmed that the stage of ego development is impacted by age and experience (Kegan, 1994).

4 FINDINGS

How do the perceptions and interpretations of the act of giving change when one moves through the stages of ego development? We observed the answers from material/non-material aspects, positive/negative, affective/cognitive aspects, and self/other (relational) aspects of answers at each ego stage; Figure A-2 presents an in-depth review of the decoding process. On the most generic level, the following movements of perception and interpretation of the act of giving were identified:

- There was a tendency for perception and interpretation to move from the material to non-material aspect of the act of giving when moving vertically from lower (E3) to higher stages of ego development (E7);
- There was a tendency for perception and interpretation to move from the negative to the positive aspect of the act of giving when moving vertically from lower (E3) to higher stages of ego development (E7);
- There was a tendency for perception and interpretation to move from the simple affects to a more nuanced recognition of affects—cognitive interpretations of the act of giving gained higher-order phenomena recognition (response, interaction, and trust) and higher-order perspective-taking—when moving vertically from lower (E3) to higher stages of ego development (E7);

Figure 1: Socio-economic features of the sample

Stage of development (Loevinger's framework)	Distribution of cases (N = 290)	Average age	Gender		Educational background		
			Male	Female	Natural sciences, engineering	Social sciences, economics	Other
Group of ordinary people							
Impulsive (E2)	1.8%	20	70%	30%	30%	60%	10%
Self-protective (E3)	8.6%	31	50%	50%	50%	50%	0%
Conformist (E4)	59.7%	30	50%	50%	29.1%	55.6%	15.4%
Self-aware (E5)	19.7%	41	50%	50%	41.9%	51.6%	6.5%
Conscientious (E6)	5.4%	43	50%	50%	10%	60%	30%
Individualistic (E7)	4.4%	45	50%	50%	10%	60%	30%

- There was a tendency for perception and interpretation to move from a focus on the impact of the act of giving directly on the self, to a focus on the impact indirectly on the self (through the response of the other side), on the quality of social exchange, on trust in the relationship, and on the counter-response of the self to others, and on the effects of this on the quality of social exchange, proximity, and trust in the relationship and well-being of the other side.

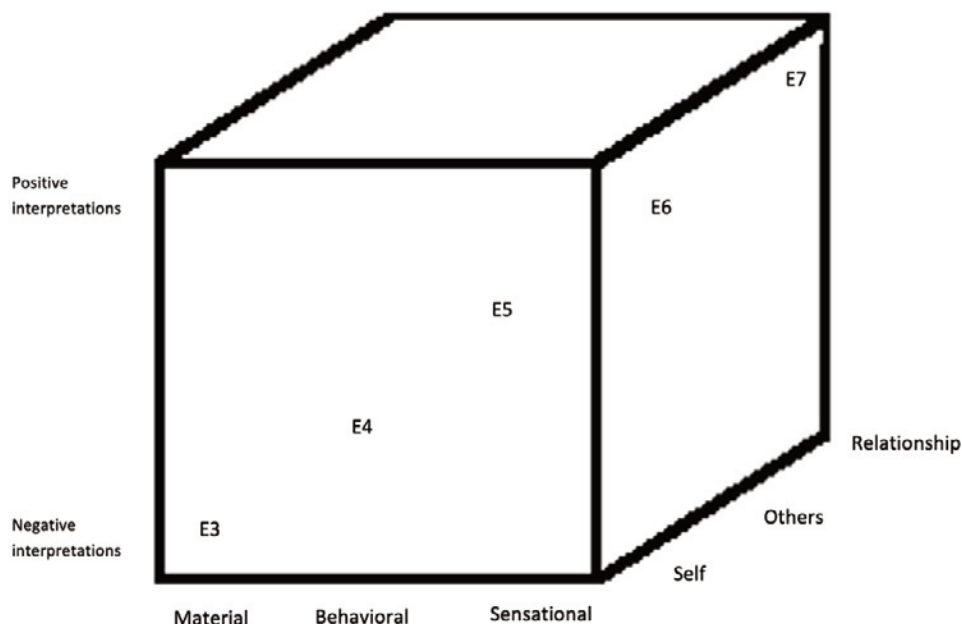
These tendencies of perceptions and interpretations of the act of giving across stages of adult development are presented graphically in Figure 2. The vertical axis depicts a negative vs. positive focus in the interpretations, the horizontal axis depicts outer-material to inner-sensational focus, and the third axis depicts the focus of the effects of the act of giving on the self, on others, or on the relationship. The pattern identified in the answers reveals a tendency for diagonal movement from inner lower left to the outer upper right corner. This indicates movement from a negative, material, self-focus to a positive, sensational and relational focus (i.e., quality social exchange). A positive, sensational, and

relational focus of the act of giving on the quality social exchange (E7) vs. a negative, material, and self-focus (E3) indicates that E7 is more likely to induce trust and create a high-quality social exchange than is E3. Furthermore, a person becomes a more effective inducer of trust and a high quality of social exchange when he/she reconstructs the ego toward higher developmental levels.

What implications can we generalize about the evolutionary tendencies around social exchange as people progress through the stages of adult development from this specific (narrow) case of social exchange (act of giving)? How might our findings around the impact of the stages of ego development on the perceptions and interpretations of the act of giving inform the rehabilitation of trust in social exchanges between leader and follower?

Based on our findings, we speculate how the willingness of a follower to entrust power to another person in exchange for services (expected benefits) might evolve as one moves across the stages of ego development, and how the willingness of a leader to address the adaptive challenges might evolve across the stages of ego development.

Figure 2: Impact of the ego development stage on the simple social exchange (act of giving)



5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Follower perspective: How can the willingness to entrust power to another person in exchange for services (expected benefits) evolve as one moves across the stages of ego development?

Heifetz (2015) calls for research (failing, successful, micro, macro, case-studies, and qualitative) that studies authority and leadership separately because of rising mistrust toward people in an authority position due to the tendency that “people in authority violate the trust of the power that they have been given and, having violated that trust, they generate significant scar tissue; some of that scar tissue gets carried from generation to generation” (Heifetz, 2011, p. 306). In addition to the research on the dark side of leadership and the corrupting tendencies of leaders in a position of authority (Conger, 1990; Kets de Vries, 2005), more research is needed on (1) how to establish and amplify trust, and (2) how to renew trust when mistrust has been established (Heifetz, 2015). Thus, we need to better understand the factors that impact the willingness to authorize the other side (the leader) and entrust him/her with power.

The willingness to authorize the other side (i.e., the leader) depends on how followers perceive and interpret the actions, motives, and attributes of a person (Hollander, 1978, 1980, 2013). A leader’s legitimacy is a function of followers’ perceptions and interpretations. The level of legitimacy impacts the leader’s power and influence to facilitate change (Hollander, 1978, 2013). Follower acceptance is essential to the legitimacy and trust of leaders; thus, leadership is a process of co-fluence between the leader and followers (Hollander, 2008, 2013)¹.

¹ Hollander’s (2013) attribution of the idiosyncratic credit to a leader is a function of perceived competence in the main group task and loyalty to group norms. The IC model thus explains the upward influence. When followers accord such credits to leaders, followers have “upward influence” (Hollander, 2004). IC is relevant for IC dynamics of “giving and taking credit,” which the essence of the process of leadership (Hollander, 2004b). Spending of leadership credit is constrained by the expectations of the followers. The challenge of the

In constructing these perceptions and interpretations, followers are the active component of leadership. Followers’ interpersonal evaluations of the leader are a function of the needs and expectations of the followers (Hollander, 1978, 1980, 2013). Accordingly, “followers’ needs also determine which tangible and intangible rewards suffice in motivating them to follow recognizing that individual differences do matter” (Hollander, 2013, p. 131).

Investigating innovators, Scharmer (2009) found that two people in the same circumstances doing the same thing can bring about completely different outcomes because the outcomes depend not only on what the person does, but also on their “interior condition,” or the inner place from which they operate (Scharmer, 2009, p. 7). The quality of inner place or the quality of awareness is a function of ego development (Loevinger, 1976; Cook-Greuter, 1985/ revised 2013). We claim that followers’ perceptions and interpretations of any outer observations (for example, words and acts of the leader) are thus a function of the quality of awareness captured by level of ego development.

Under what conditions is the person at the lower stages of ego development (follower) willing to entrust power to another, and what do they expect in return?

Based on the findings about how expectations and interpretations around the act of giving evolve across stages of ego development, we assume that if a follower is at the lower stages of ego development (in our case, at E3 or E4), he/she would be willing to entrust power to another in exchange for the benefits valued for the self. The valued benefits are self and materially focused. It is preferable that the expected benefits should be perceived as a prospect

IC model is that leaders may initiate change, but also show sufficient compliance to the group norms; the leadership challenge is to balance both forces. Hollander puts forth three limitations to a leader’s potential influence that arise from the follower side: (1) “What have you done for us lately?”; (2) the lack of perceptiveness of a leader on an available credit; and (3) followers represent a variety of interests (Hollander, 2013, p. 218).

for increased monetary reward, promotion, improved social status, and other forms of tangible rewards. Furthermore, a person at the lower stage of ego development tends to pay more attention to the instances in which expectations of the rewards are not met. They prefer to interpret the effects of the social exchange negatively. In an open-system case (i.e., election and voting), the follower would prefer (attribute idiosyncratic credit) a person who is perceived to be more likely to deliver valued benefits (i.e., increase in wages, employment stability, etc.). In a closed-system case (i.e., a company), the selection of a person in a position of authority unfolds in a top-down manner; in this case, we propose that a person at the lower stage of ego development would engage in more work effort in the case of perception and delivery of material and status benefits.

Under what conditions is a person at the higher stages of ego development (follower) willing to entrust power to another, and what is expected in return?

If the follower is at the higher stages of ego development (in our case, at E6 or E7), the criteria for entrusting a power shift from material to non-material (sensational; shifting attention from material and behavioral appearances to feelings, assumptions, and beliefs behind specific appearances), from benefits for the self to the quality of the relationship (the other side is taken in consideration in terms of its effects on the quality of the relationship). The core criteria for evaluating the quality of the relationship are proximity and trust. Here, the person recognizes the active role in defining the quality of the relationship in terms of how she/he frames their own expectations and controls responses. People at higher stages of ego development prefer to interpret the effects of the social exchange positively. In an open-system case (i.e., election and voting), the follower prefers to vote for the person who is perceived to be more likely to create trust and build proximity in the relationship (inclusiveness). In a closed-system case (i.e., a company), the person at the higher stage of ego development engages in a more dyadic relationship in a case in which proximity and trust also are valued from the leader (i.e., the person in a position of authority).

5.2 Leader perspective: How can the willingness of the leader to address the adaptive challenges evolve across the stages of ego development?

From the perspective of how a leader should approach the leadership situation, Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow (2009) differentiated between two types of leadership challenges: technical problems and adaptive challenges. Whereas technical problems may be very complex and critically important (i.e., cardiac surgery), they have known solutions (the knowledge and capacity already exist); thus, such problems can be resolved by an authority, an expert, or by tested procedures, norms, and systems. In contrast, adaptive challenges have no solution or the solution lies outside of people's current repertoires; therefore, the solution can be addressed only through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. An adaptive challenge is defined as the gap between the values people stand for and the reality that they face (their current lack of capacity to realize those values in their environment). In the next decade, the most predictable trend will be a rise of adaptive challenges (Sowcik, Andenoro, McNutt, & Murphy, 2015). The distinctive attribute of a leader is the capacity to address complex organizational challenges through adaptive leadership (Nelson & Squires, 2017).

A classic leadership error is treating an adaptive challenge as a technical problem (Heifetz, Linsky, and Grashow, 2009). When dealing with the adaptive challenge, adaptive leaders are "certainly not as well received as when you are mobilizing people to address a technical issue that is within their competence or requires expertise that can be readily obtained" (Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009, p.17). Not benefiting from adaptive challenges, losing credits and authority, etc., are the core obstacles for addressing adaptive challenges. There is a need to extend the strategic leadership research to better understand phenomena of addressing adaptive challenges from the perspective of (a) chief executive officer (CEO) characteristics and (b) the dynamics of interactions among the CEO, the top management team, and the Board (Vera, Bonardi, Hitt, & Withers, 2022).

The core task of an adaptive CEO is to enable the dynamic networks of all stakeholders (not only followers) to achieve common goals in an environment of uncertainty. The stakeholders are all those individuals who place value on a role (Mitroff, 1983) while also expecting to be impacted by the leader (Volckmann, 2014). When co-electively activating such networks of stakeholders, the system first tends to de-construct [i.e., it goes down the U curve in Schamer's (2009) U-theory concept). This initially increases disequilibrium and causes an increase in the negative effects on the followers and other stakeholder groups.

When operating in disequilibrium, the negative effects on different stakeholder groups experienced in the state of disequilibrium will be attributed to the leader. Adaptive leaders thus need the capacity to sustain operations in disequilibrium (Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009). A high level of conflict, frustration, panic, confusion, disorientation, and fear can be attributed to the leader (i.e., a person in the position of authority). Thus, the personal challenge of a leader is to sustain their own effective functioning when faced with negative returns. In other words, what are the conditions under which a person is more willing to address the adaptive challenge and function effectively in the face of negative returns?

Under what conditions is the person at a lower stages of ego development (leader) willing to address the adaptive challenge, and what is the expectation in return?

If the leader is at the lower stages of ego development (in our case, at E3 or E4), he/she gives more attention to the material benefits for the self; even when it comes to most elementary social exchanges, such as the act of giving, such people tend to interpret it in a sense of "what's in it for me?" If addressing the adaptive challenge, a leader at the lower stage of ego development would need to foresee such benefits in order to embark on an adaptive leadership journey. However, when addressing the adaptive challenge, the collective (stakeholder) system tends to move into a larger state of disequilibrium. The experience of conflict, frustration, panic, confusion, disorientation, and fear in a leader at the lower stage of ego development most likely would put more atten-

tion on decisions and actions that increase the likelihood to gain the material benefits for the self. In this case, a negative, vicious circle is created, and the negative perceptions and attributions may amplify. This creates the dynamic of "absencing" in Scharmer's sense (2009). Absencing might become a leader-stakeholder dynamic despite the fact that the leader initiates the adaptive challenge.

Under what conditions is a person at the higher stages of ego development (leader) willing to address the adaptive challenge, and what does he/she expect in return?

When a leader is at the higher stages of ego development (in our case at E6 or E7), he/she substantially changes interpretations of the benefits caused by the act of giving; the core interpretational movement is from material to non-material (sensational; shifting attention from material and behavioral appearances to feelings, assumptions, and beliefs behind the specific appearances), from benefits for the self to the quality of the relationship (the other side is taken into consideration as much as it effects the quality of the relationship), from a negative to a more positive-oriented focus. The core criteria for evaluating the quality of the relationship are proximity and trust. When a leader at the higher stage of ego development addresses an adaptive challenge, he/she is more capable of operating and living in the face of conflict, frustration, panic, confusion, disorientation, and fear. This capacity to thrive in chaos is sustained by the leaders' attention to decisions and actions that increase the likelihood of trust and proximity in the relationships with stakeholders, positive interpretations, and the constant scanning of the assumptions and beliefs behind the specific appearances. Such leaders thus are more likely to induce a cycle of presencing in the collective of stakeholders (Scharmer, 2009).

5.3 Theoretical Contributions, Practical Implications and Research Limitations

The core theoretical contribution of this study is the merging of LMX theory with neo-Piagetan adult development theory, also referred to as constructive developmental theory, which is understudied in the

leadership literature (McCauley et al., 2006). This is addressed through the study of the evolution of the act of giving through ego development stages. The identified evolutionary properties of act of the giving are interpreted through the perspective of LMX theory. This merger brings a completely novel perspective to LMX theory. It sets the cognition, perception, and interpretation of a leader and a follower as an object of study. This also is an understudied phenomenon in leadership research (Toader & Martin, 2022).

The next theoretical contribution is explaining the follower perspective through the willingness to entrust power to another person in exchange for services (expected benefits), whereas the leader perspective is explained through the willingness of the leader to address the adaptive challenges. This is another novel perspective on LMX theory. Our findings advance the understanding of the development of leader–follower relationships and have implications for strengthening follower perceptions of high-quality relationships with their leaders, and when a leader is addressing adaptive challenges. This also is an understudied phenomenon in leadership research (Wang, Jiang, Xu, Zhou, & Bauer, 2022).

This study may have several practical implications. When selecting people for leadership positions, the selection criteria should include the stage of adult development. Leaders at a higher stage of adult development are more willing to address adaptive leadership challenges. Next, followers' stages of adult development also matters. Whereas followers at a lower stage of adult development entrust power to a leader in exchange for more material benefit, followers at a higher stage of adult development are more willing to entrust power to a person who is more likely to create trust and build proximity in the relationship (inclusiveness). This has profound implications for the practice of leading and leadership effectiveness. The stage of adult development and self-awareness are critical elements in the practice of leading and leadership effectiveness that are on the rise in leadership research (Carden, Jones, & Passmore, 2022).

The study has several research limitations. Although it appears that the use of adult development is gaining traction in the field of leadership development, instruments for assessing adult development

such as the WUSCT can appear to be unreliable (Realms, 2017). The study was conducted in the Slovene language and then translated into English; in the process of translation, some of the meaning may change or even be lost. The proposed relationships for LMX theory also have weak generalizability. This study is hard to replicate.

However, we propose some future research that may overcome some of the research limitations. We propose the study of leader–member social exchange using quantitative questionnaires that include the identified adult development constructs: positive/negative interpretations, material/behavioral/sensational focus, and focus on self/other/relationship. These constructs can be studied quantitatively using appropriate questionnaires. Some in-depth case studies of leaders' intentions for addressing the adaptive challenges and followers' intentions for entrusting power to a leader also would add novel evidence that would validate or invalidate our findings. Future research should include the stage of adult development as an important explanatory variable in LMX relationship.

5.4 Conclusion

This paper addresses the research question of how the stages of ego development impact the interpretation schemes of the simple social exchange (act of giving)? The act of giving is worthy of study for several reasons: (1) the act of giving is the behavioral expression of generativity, which is an important aspect of ego development; and (2) generativity is an important phenomenon to be observed in a case scale system transformation. Using a sample of $N = 290$ respondents, we present the research findings of how the evolution of the interpretation schemes of the act of giving evolve across the levels of ego development. Based on research findings, we theorize how different interpretation schemes of the act of giving might inform the phenomenon of social exchange between the leader and followers (and all relevant stakeholders). Specifically, we formed implications from two LMX perspectives: (1) the follower perspective—how a willingness to entrust power to another person in exchange for services (expected benefits) might evolve as one moves across the stages of ego devel-

opment; and (2) the leader perspective—how a willingness of the leader to address the adaptive challenges might evolve across the stages of ego development. The attempt to generalize the implications from a simple case of social exchange (the act of giving) to a more complex case of social exchange (leader–member exchange) led to the conclusions that (1) the stage of ego development on the side of the follower and on the side of a leader

significantly impact the properties and effects of the social exchange; and (2) higher orders of ego development in the leader and follower induce higher-quality social exchange and a greater likelihood of resolution of adaptive challenges. Hence, mechanism, approaches, and methodologies that accelerate the progression to higher ego stages of both followers and leaders (preferably all stakeholders) should become the object of studies.

EXTENDED SUMMARY/IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava raziskovalno vprašanje, kako stopnje osebnega razvoja posameznika vplivajo na osmišljanje preproste družbene izmenjave (preučujemo dejanje prostovoljnega dajanja daril, pohval ipd.). Na vzorcu 290 anketirancev predstavljamo izsledke raziskave o evoluciji osmišljanja prostovoljnega dajanja po stopnjah osebnega razvoja. Izsledki raziskave razkrivajo, da višje stopnje osebnega razvoja osmišljajo dejanje prostovoljnega dejanja manj materialno, bolj pozitivno, pri tem doživljajo bolj kompleksna čustva, izhajajo iz več zornih kotov in so bolj osredotočene na kvaliteto odnosa z prejemnikom darila. Identificirane tendence posplošimo na učinke za vodenje, pri čemer izhajamo iz teorije izmenjave vodja-član (angl. leader–member exchange; LMX). Zaključimo, da višja stopnja osebnega razvoja vodi do bolj kakovostne izmenjave vodja-član in povečuje verjetnost rešitve prilagoditvenih problemov pri vodenju. Poleg tega je verjetneje, da bodo člani bolj zaupali vodji v zameno za visokokakovostne odnose med njimi. Članek poskuša združiti teorijo LMX s konstruktivno šolo razvoja odraslih. Ta združitev osvetljuje zanimivo razmerje, in sicer, da je stopnja osebnega razvoja verjeten dejavnik kakovosti izmenjave vodja-član in povečuje uspešnost vodenja.

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APPENDIX:

Figure A- 1: Inter-rater reliability measured by Cohen’s kappa

Intraclass Correlation Coefficient							
	Intraclass Correlation ^a	95% Confidence Interval		F Test with True Value 0			
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Value	df1	df2	Sig.
Single Measures	0.965 ^b	0.953	0.973	55.462	184	184	0.000
Average Measures	0.982 ^c	0.976	0.987	55.462	184	184	0.000
Two-way mixed-effects model in which people effects are random and measures effects are fixed.							
^a Type A intraclass correlation coefficients using an absolute agreement definition..							
^b The estimator is the same, whether or not the interaction effect is present.							
^c This estimate is computed assuming the interaction effect is absent, because it is not estimable otherwise.							

Figure A-2: Perceptions and interpretations of the intentions for giving and the expected or unexpected consequences resulting from the act of giving across ego development stages

	General cognitive and behavioral tendencies of the stage (Loevinger, 2013)	Perspective focus on the expected and unexpected outcome of giving	Excerpts
Self-protective (E3)	Controlled by impulses. Poor language. Interpersonal relationships are viewed from the perspective of taking. A manipulative or deceptive attitude toward others. Fear of being manipulated and deceived.	Material focus. Act of giving and its consequence not under reflective attention. Focus on negative effects (negative feelings and thoughts). Words and feelings simplistic. Material focus. Effects on the self (how I feel). Effects on another person not included in the interpretation	<p>“Dissatisfaction of a person.”</p> <p>“Spoiling.”</p> <p>“Not-good enough present.”</p> <p>“Good feeling when I give.”</p> <p>“Bad if getting an expensive gift.”</p> <p>“The embarrassment of choosing a gift.”</p> <p>“Gratitude not shown.”</p> <p>“Something in return.”</p> <p>“Feeling to give back.”</p>
Conformist (E4)	Give many conventional responses. Interpretations conceptually simplistic. Frequent use of like, never, or everyone. Judgmental approach, right/wrong. Interpersonal relationships described as behaviors. Search for social acceptability and belonging.	<p>Giving gets more attention. Material focus.</p> <p>More complex interpretations.</p> <p>Focus on the emotional impact of the act of giving on the self.</p> <p>Emotional effects are framed simplistically (satisfaction, dissatisfaction).</p> <p>The other side enters into the perspective, but the attention is given primarily to how the response of the other side affects the self.</p> <p>Transactional-material approach to act of giving (exchange of equal values). The expectation of reciprocation of equal value.</p> <p>Disappointment if the reciprocated response is not aligned with the expectations. A lack of clarity around the expectations as a response.</p>	<p>“Feeling of joy, love, importance.”</p> <p>“That the gift is not well received or does not end where it should.”</p> <p>“A problem can arise when the value of gifts is different, and you may feel that you owe someone else who gave you a more expensive gift.”</p> <p>“I get a sense of possession or abundance.”</p> <p>“Gifting is something nice, and it is polite for the gifted person to accept and give thanks. It also happened to me that he did not want to accept the gift.”</p> <p>“If you receive a gift, you feel obliged to return it yourself.”</p> <p>“In the past, I learned that it is necessary to think carefully who you give to, and how much one deserves. In the past, I probably, like everyone, was very negatively surprised in this regard.”</p> <p>“People taking it for granted, and forgetting what I have done for them.”</p> <p>“You give too much to someone who doesn’t deserve it.”</p> <p>“Dissatisfaction with high expectations, desire for more and more.”</p> <p>“More willingness to engage.”</p> <p>“Gifting brings a smile to your face.”</p> <p>“Tears of happiness if the gift was a surprise.”</p> <p>“We always want more and more.”</p> <p>“Satisfaction.”</p> <p>“Satisfaction that you help.”</p>

Self-awareness (E5)	<p>Perceived multiple possibilities and alternatives in the situation. Actions in terms of appropriateness. More intimately tied to interpersonal relationships. More aware of individual differences in attitudes, interests, and abilities. Being responsible and fair is an important theme. The morality is one of helpfulness, altruism, and some concern for larger social issues.</p>	<p>Material focus. Giving in the perspective from effects on both sides, thus focus on the relationship, social exchange. Recognition of multi-faceted nature of effects giving on the relationship. Effects of giving on the social exchange are positive (social glue), negative (subversive expression of) and neutral (a method of influence). Emotional impact of the act of giving on the self is becoming more nuanced, emotional distinctions are becoming more fine-grained; attention remains on the positive effects of the self, yet the effects are induced by the quality of social exchange (and not narrowly by the behavioral response of the other side).</p>	<p>"Now and again I am amazed at how grateful some people can be, sincerely grateful when you give them something, even if you give only a little." "In the past, I was very disappointed to give more than I received, and over time, I learned how to evaluate people well and thereby reduce uncertainty in such situations." "Giving promotes collaboration and social cohesion." "Too many people give things just to display a higher social status than they hold. We should give to those to whom we are precious, and not only to those who are dear to us." "Some special emotion like joy when you sense someone happy/joyful/satisfied with the gift and attention." "That instead of having a positive effect on a person, your effect is negative, and that way you hurt a person, and cause damage to the relationship."</p>
Conscientious (E6)	<p>Absolute statements and rules replaced by comparison, contingent statements. Capable of combining opposing alternatives holistically. Presenting choices and decisions. Have long-term goals and ideals. Concerned with life's purpose. Recognize the inevitability of human imperfections. Report emotional nuances. Distinguishes appearances from the underlying feelings. The physical aspect of a person is contrasted to mental and spiritual aspects. A broader temporal and social context.</p>	<p>The non-material aspects of giving enter our attention (i.e., giving attention to someone is also an act of giving). Giving as a mechanism of high-quality bonding; a tool to induce trust in the relationship. The creation of trust in the relationship is a function of my response on the response of others; becoming aware that proper/improper act of giving is defined expectations one carries; starting to learn to loosen expectations; not to expect anything is the best approach. The properly performed act of giving increases proximity with other person in the relationship, high quality. A high-quality social exchange creates a positive impact on the self because it induces a feeling of connectedness (compassion).</p>	<p>"It is more important to take time and effort to make someone happy and joyful; material things are not so important." "When I give something, I can feel good, a little more fulfilled; sometimes I expect something in return but not always. Sometimes when I give, do that to express attention that is expected in our society. When I give, I am also aware of my will to serve. Sometimes I have assisted people with different acts of kindness out of my sub-consciousness because this is part of us humans. When I help, I also give advice, because this helps build up communication and trustful relationships and friendships. I help because I feel I am connected and I am not uncaring. In school, I have received more help than I have given in return. . . . At work, I help most of the time and only sometimes and rarely say no." "Tears of happiness and a hug. Pleasure and compassion." "I expect not to be moved, but usually it pleases me. Usually, people are surprised. I prefer to give time, affection, gifts, and emotional support. You need me, I'll be there. Why would I need to get anything from it? I like it, so I do it." "Satisfaction, the feeling that I have done something right—when I see the positive reaction in the person I have influenced with a gift or attention." "What I give to others it is unconditional and I expect nothing in return, so I have no unexpected consequences." "Consequence is the connection through a sense of fulfillment, inner warmth, positive affect." "When giving, releasing even greater happiness than when receiving a gift." If the gift is perceived with sincere joy, I feel that I made that person happy and I get the feeling of satisfaction. I think that I like the person more. If the gift is not appreciated. I try not to show disappointment. I think that after such "acceptance" of the gift I move away from that particular person." "When I'm a giver and I need to give a gift to my family or friends I initially feel stressed out! This is when I have to choose a gift. Usually, I choose something they would be able to use. When this phase is behind me, I am happy that I was able to choose "the proper" gift. When I give the gift to the person that is close to me, I usually feel happy and gentle. However, more important for me is how the gift is being perceived. If the gift is perceived with sincere joy, I feel that I made that person happy and I get the feeling of satisfaction. I think that I like the person more. If the gift is not appreciated (you can hear thank you, but your gut feeling tells you it is not sincere), I try not to show disappointment. I think that after such "acceptance" of the gift I move away from that particular person.</p>

Individualistic (7)	<p>Responses are unique, but not all unique responses are rated that highly in terms of interpretation and perspective-taking. The exact wording is rarely replicated. Embrace simple ideas expressed at the lower levels as one complex idea). Like to reconcile ideas that are at previous stages expressed as polar. Distrust purely rational analysis in favor of a more holistic view. feelings and context are taken into an account. Realizes that most prior meaning-making and identities were socially constructed and culturally conditioned. Learn to consciously scrutinize their own beliefs and assumptions. do not impose their views on others.</p>	<p>Non-material aspects of giving receive full acknowledgement. Giving is a language of social exchange. Expectations of the response of giving are loosened. Attention is paid to the intentions and assumptions behind the act of giving. Better sensing the intentions and assumptions behind the act of giving serves to structure more proper response. The proper response is defined by the capacity to create a positive impact on others. Critical to assess the impact on other is change well-being. An increase of the feeling of well-being in others increases the feeling of well-being in the self. Giving creates a space/mirror for learning about the self and others. Giving as a form of being. When attention is paid to society at large, recognition that there is a mismatch between how one act in terms of being and what is unfolding in the outer reality.</p>	<p>“When I receive something, I understand it as a sign of appreciation and thank you, either for good deeds done or just as gratitude for being there for someone. I’m always interested in what the purpose of giving is so that I can thank them for their attention and see what made them feel so good that they decided to give me something. It is always good to know the reason so that you can make them feel good more often and teach you what one cherishes and appreciates. Besides, it gives me the reflection to see how much they know me and give me things that means a lot to me. Things in this context can be material or immaterial, such as “thank you,” hug, kiss, breakfast, help in preparing lunch, a voluntary initiative to do something instead of me . . . in a business setting, we do not take time for personal relationships, for building the trust and letting each other know that going the extra mile matters and it’s noticed. It also creates a team spirit, where mutual wins are greater than individual ones, and that we are not an egoistic society. Unfortunately, this doesn’t always work.” “I always want to give a gift-hit. Of course, it happens a gift-miss to me, too. But giving is a kind of language, so if I give a gift-miss, then we speak two different languages. The unexpected consequence is that I start analysing where I missed and plan to improve that on the next occasion; I want to know you. This means a lot to me. The unexpected consequence is a reflection on how people care less and less: ‘Just bring a present like each year and we’re done.’ This happens in a personal and business context. This reflection is for me unpleasant. I estimate it is also a reflection of the time we are living in. At the end of the day, I just wish the receiver recognizes my effort in preparing and giving the gift to him. I shake hands, I hug, I kiss.”</p>
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