

Ingratiation, Perceived Similarity Effects on Job Performance: The Mediating Role of Leader-Member Exchange

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Abstract: *The metal business encounters significant market competition, compelling manufacturing companies to enhance human resource management to ensure consistent job performance. This study, based on Social Exchange Theory (SET), seeks to investigate the impact of Ingratiation and Perceived Similarity on Job Performance, with Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) serving as a mediating variable at PT. XYZ Indonesia. This study used a quantitative methodology to examine data from a saturated sample of 150 employees via the PLS-SEM technique through SmartPLS 4.0 software. The findings demonstrate that Ingratiation and LMX have significant and positive direct impacts on Job Performance. Conversely, Perceived Similarity does not directly influence Job Performance. LMX significantly mediates effects of both Ingratiation and Perceived Similarity on Job Performance. The integrated model effectively accounts for 72.7% of the variance in employee performance. The findings indicate that within the SET framework, cultivating high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships is essential for enhancing workplace task productivity.*

INTRODUCTION

The metal industry, especially steel and iron, significantly supports the global economy by contributing to the construction, automotive, and heavy manufacturing sectors. (World Steel Association, 2024) reports that the worldwide steel output amounts to approximately 1.8-1.9 billion tons annually. This industry faces numerous obstacles, including demand variability, overcapacity, and intensifying market competitiveness. The basic metal sector in Indonesia faces challenges such as elevated manufacturing costs, reliance on imported raw materials, and competition from international products. These factors suggest that manufacturing firms must enhance the efficacy of human resource management to sustain their job performance.

The manufacturing sector has emerged as a fundamental pillar of Indonesia's economy. According to data from the BPS, the processing industrial sector accounted for 18.52% of Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the second quarter of 2024. In this context, job performance is critical, as the company's operational activities significantly depend on coordination, communication, and teamwork. PT. XYZ Indonesia, a manufacturer of cutting dies, experiences challenges in sustaining production precision and punctually.

These variations signify a lack of consistency in job performance. (Lestari & Budiono, 2021) defined performance as the outcome produced by an individual in fulfilling their duties, whereas (Giao et al., 2020) asserted that job performance indicates an individual's capacity to accomplish tasks in alignment with organizational objectives. Consequently, it is essential to comprehend the determinants that affect job performance in manufacturing industries.

The quality of the interaction between supervisors and subordinates, known as leader-member exchange (LMX), is a significant element influencing job performance. (Ji et al., 2023) elucidate that high-quality leader-member exchange (LMX) connections afford enhanced support and resource accessibility for job. Positive working relationship can augment employee motivation and their contributions to the organization (Radstaak & Hennes, 2017).

In addition to LMX, interpersonal activities such as ingratiation also affect work relationships. Ingratiation is an individual's attempt to cultivate a favorable impression of their superiors through flattery, loyalty, or alignment of beliefs. Ingratiation is a successful interpersonal strategy within businesses (M. Bolino et al., 2016). Conversely, perceived similarity is a significant determinant of professional partnerships. Perceived similarity correlates with shared values, attributes, and cognitive styles, which can improve interpersonal intimacy and the quality of work-related communication (Cohen & Hershman-Shitrit, 2017).

The preliminary findings of PT. XYZ Indonesia reveal that communication between superiors and subordinates is suboptimal, with notable disparities in employee treatment, as well as ingratiation behaviors and perceived differences in relational similarity within the workplace. These conditions suggest that interpersonal issues can influence employees' job performances.

Prior studies have indicated that ingratiation and perceived similarity influence the quality of leader-member exchange and job performance. Nevertheless, research investigating the impact of ingratiation and perceived similarity on work performance through leader-member communication as a mediating variable remains limited. This study examines the impact of ingratiation and perceived similarity on job performance, mediated by leader-member exchange interchange, PT. XYZ Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

This study utilizes Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005)), as its overarching theoretical framework. Social Exchange Theory asserts that organizational relationships evolve according to the principle of reciprocity, wherein individuals assess interactions through a cost-benefit analysis. Within this perspective, ingratiation denotes an individual's endeavor in impression management to foster a bonding by fostering trust and psychological security. Thus, Leader-Member Exchange signifies the true quality of the employee's end output, namely Job Performance.

Ingratiation

Ingratiation is a method of impression management employed by individuals to secure favorable assessments from others, particularly their superiors in a professional setting. Ingratiation is a behavior executed by individuals through commendation, aid, and endorsement to enhance interpersonal appeal (Bande et al., 2019). This statement suggests that ingratiation behavior serves as a social strategy to enhance working relationships and secure acceptance within the organizational context. Moreover, Sibunruang and Kawai (2023) asserts that employees frequently employ ingratiation to elicit the favor of their superiors and augment their career prospects within the organization. This demonstrates that ingratiation behavior serves not

only to cultivate interpersonal relationships but also to advance career aspirations and an individual's status within the workplace. Ingratiation can augment trust and the quality of workplace social relationships; however, if excessive, it may result in adverse perceptions from both superiors and peers (Fitriastuti & Vanderstraeten, 2022). Ingratiation is defined as an individual's social conduct intended to cultivate a favorable impression, enhance interpersonal relationships, and facilitate the attainment of organizational objectives.

Bolino and Turnley (1999), as referenced by Parekev et al., (2024), delineate ingratiation through five behavioral indicators : offering compliments, exhibiting friendliness, demonstrating attentiveness, rendering assistance with tasks, and providing help when necessary. Numerous studies have demonstrated that ingratiation influences leader-member exchange and job performance. (Koopman et al., 2015) study revealed that ingratiation behavior can enhance the quality of relationships between superiors and subordinates. The findings suggest that ingratiation behavior can enhance social interactions and foster harmonious working relationships. (Parekev et al., 2024) demonstrated that ingratiation positively influences job performance metrics. The findings suggest that appropriately executed ingratiation behavior can enhance individual performance assessment and work efficacy. Ingratiation can enhance the quality of leader-member exchange, although excessive behavior may undermine work relationships because it is perceived as insincerity by superiors (Wang et al., 2025).

Perceived Similarity

Perceived similarity refers to an individual's assessment of the extent of resemblance between themselves and others, particularly regarding values, attitudes, and cognitive processes. Perceived similarity as the degree to which individuals believe they share similarities with others in social or professional relationships (Zhafira et al., 2022). This suggests that perceived similarity fosters comfort and interpersonal intimacy in the workplace. Perceived similarity encompasses congruences in values, viewpoints, and work methodologies that can enhance interpersonal relationships (Valenzuela et al., 2020). This demonstrated that individuals with commonalities are more likely to establish effective communication and collaboration. Perceived similarity can augment interpersonal attraction, trust, and the quality of workplace social relationship (H. Liu et al., 2016). Perceived similarity refers to an individual's recognition of shared characteristics, values, and perspectives that can enhance professional relationships within an organization.

In this study, perceived similarity denotes the construct established by Turban and Jones (1988) and utilized by Zheng and Chang (2026). The measurement employs three indicators : congruence in values, opinions, and perspectives ; alignment of situational perception ; and overall similarity between subordinates and supervisors. Prior studies have indicated that perceived similarity positively influences leader-member exchange and job performance. (Li et al., 2022) study revealed that the congruence of values and attitudes between superiors and subordinates can improve the quality of Leader-Member Exchange relationships. The findings suggest that the existence of distinctive similarities can enhance communication and trust in professional relationships. Similarities in individual characteristics strengthen work relationships and enhance organizational citizenship behavior (Parent-Rochelleau et al., 2020). Perceived cultural similarity enhances job performance by elevating the quality of work relationships between superiors and subordinates (C. Liu, 2021).

Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-member exchange (LMX) refers to the quality of the social exchange relationship between superiors and subordinates within an organization. Leader-member exchange as a reciprocal relationship established through communication, loyalty, contribution, and mutual respect between leaders and members (Kangas, 2021). This suggests that the quality of the professional relationship is affected by the social interactions established between superiors and subordinates. Leader-member exchange embodies work interactions that foster mutually advantageous relationships through support and trust between superiors and subordinates (Regts et al., 2019). This demonstrates that a positive working relationship can improve comfort and productivity within an organization. Leader-subordinates relationship is a crucial determinant of work effectiveness and organizational success (Kong et al., 2019). Leader-member exchange can be defined as a reciprocal professional relationship established through trust, communication, loyalty, and support between superiors and subordinates.

In this study, leader-member exchange denotes the quality of the relational exchange between leaders and subordinate, as articulated by Liden dan Maslyn (1998). According Robert and Vandenberghe (2020) Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is assessed through four dimensions : affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect. The indicators encompass personal affinity, pleasurable interactions, leader support, safeguarding reputation, work initiative, additional effort for the team, acknowledgment of technical proficiency and esteem for professional reputation. These indicators assess the quality of the working relationship between superiors and subordinates within an organization. Prior studies have demonstrated that leader-member exchange positively influences job performance. Superior working relationships between supervisors and subordinates can improve job performance (Jufrizen et al., 2024). The results demonstrate that amicable professional relationships can improve personal motivation and efficiency. Leader-member exchange substantially affects the enhancement of work productivity through harmonious interpersonal relationships (Muhiddin et al., 2025).

Job Performance

Job performance represents the degree of success that job achieve in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities in accordance with organizational standards. Job performance reflects employee's work accomplishments, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in task completion (Şahin & Kanbur, 2022). This statement articulates that job performance correlates with an individual's capacity to generate work output that fulfills the company's objectives. Job performance encompasses not only task completion but also an individual's capacity to effectively utilize knowledge, skills, and work commitment. This suggests that professional success is contingent on an individual's capacity to effectively manage their competencies during job performance. Job performance encompasses a sequence of work activities executed effectively and efficiently to attain organizational objectives (Nawi & Ismail, 2021). Job performance can be defined as the outcome of an individual's work that demonstrates quality, quantity, effectiveness, and accountability in executing their duties.

This study measured job performance using indicators derived from Maksum and Abidin (2026). These indicators signify employee's capacity to generate high-quality output, meet work objectives, comprehend their roles, execute tasks in alignment with prescribed protocols, and exhibit accountability for their designated responsibilities. The metrics of job performance include (1) quality of work, (2) quantity of work, (3) job knowledge, (4) task execution, and (5) job accountability. These indicators assess the degree to which employees fulfill their task accordance with the company's objectives and standards. Numerous studies have demonstrated

that job performance is affected by the quality of interpersonal relationships within an organization. (DİRLİK et al., 2023) demonstrated that leader-member exchange positively influences job performance. The findings suggest that a strong working relationship between supervisors and subordinates can improve the productivity of employees. A robust working relationship between supervisors and subordinates enhances individual productivity and performance (Latifoglu et al., 2023). Furthermore, (Zakiy, 2024) demonstrated that the alignment of interpersonal relationships and the quality of work interactions affect the enhancement of job performance.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative methodology and causal research to examine the impact of ingratiation and perceived similarity on job performance, with leader-member exchange as a mediating variable. The quantitative technique was selected because this research seeks to examine the relationship between variables through numerical data measurement and systematic statistical analysis. The study population comprised all employees of PT. XYZ Indonesia, amounting to 150 individuals. The employed sampling strategy was non-probability sampling utilizing saturated sampling, encompassing the entire population as the study sample. Data collection was conducted via the dissemination of online surveys on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data analysis was performed using *Structural Equation Modeling* based on *Partial Least Squares* (SEM-PLS) using SmartPLS 4 software. This method was selected because of its capacity to concurrently assess correlations across latent constructs, manage intricate research models, and accommodate limited sample sizes and non-normally distributed data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Output Results Construct Reliability and Validity

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Information
Ingratiation	0.876	0.882	0.669	Reliable
Job Performance	0.962	0.963	0.748	Reliable
Leader-Member Exchange	0.952	0.953	0.677	Reliable
Perceived Similarity	0.743	0.745	0.661	Reliable

Source : Data processed, 2026

All constructs exhibit Cronbach's Alpha values beyond the required level 0.70, signifying that the measurement items for each variable are dependable. The greatest Cronbach's Alpha is recorded in Job Performance (0.962), followed by Leader-Member Exchange (0.952), but lowest value is noted in Perceived Similarity (0.743), which nonetheless meets the acceptable reliability standard. The Composite Reliability (rho_a) values for all constructions surpass 0.70, affirming that the constructs exhibit robust internal consistency. Job Performance exhibits the greatest

rho_a value (0.963), succeeded by Leader-Member Exchange (0.953), while Perceived Similarity registers the lowest value (0.745), which is still within the acceptable range. Moreover, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50, so affirming that each construct attains sufficient convergent validity. This signifies that the indicators account for over fifty percent of the variation of their corresponding latent variables. The highest Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is achieved by Job Performance (0.748), and the lowest AVE is associated with Perceived Similarity (0.661), both exceeding the required level. The findings demonstrate that all constructs in this study meet the standards for reliability and validity. Consequently, the measuring model is deemed robust and appropriate for subsequent structural analysis investigating the links among Ingratiation, Perceived Similarity, Leader-Member Exchange and Job Performance.

Table 2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Variables	Ingratiation	Job Performance	Leader-Member Exchange	Perceived Similarity
Ingratiation				
Job Performance	0.889			
Leader-Member Exchange	0.844	0.814		
Perceived Similarity	0.596	0.619	0.763	

Source : Data processed, 2026

The HTMT analysis in the table indicates that all construct satisfy the discriminant validity criterion, with all HTMT values remaining below the well recognized threshold of 0.90. The correlation between Ingratiation and Job Performance (0.889) demonstrates adequate discriminant validity, indicating that while the two constructs are closely related, they remain empirically separate. Similarly, the HTMT values for Ingratiation and Leader-Member Exchange (0.844), along with Job Performance and Leader-Member Exchange (0.814), fall below the suggested threshold, so affirming that these constructs assess distinct ideas. Moreover, Perceived Similarity exhibits acceptable discriminant validity with Ingratiation (0.596), Job Performance (0.619), and Leader-Member Exchange (0.763), signifying sufficient differentiation across the constructs. All HTMT values being below 0.90 indicates that each construct is empirically unique, hence demonstrating that the measurement model has attained good discriminant validity.

Table 3. R Square (R²)

Variables	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Job Performance	0.727	0.721
Leader-Member Exchange	0.694	0.690

Source : Data processed, 2026

The R Square value indicates that the model can explain 72.7% of the variance in the Job Performance variable, with an adjusted R square value of 72.1%, which takes into account the number of predictors in the model. For the Leader-Member Exchange variable, the model can explain 69.4% of the variance, with an adjusted R square value 69.0%. these figures indicate that the model has sufficient ability to explain data variability in both constructs.

Table 4. Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Variables	Q^2 predict
Leader-Member Exchange _(Z)	0.683
Job Performance _(Y)	0.676

Source : Data processed, 2026

According to Hair et al., (2022), a Q^2 predict value above 0 indicators valid predictive relevance, while values exceeding 0.35 signify a large out-of sample predictive power. The Q^2 values are 0.683 for Leader-Member Exchange and 0.676 for Job Performance. As both scores significantly exceed the 0.35 threshold, the conceptual framework exhibits enhanced prediction accuracy. The elevated results substantiate that the model is proficient and predicting workplace relationship dynamics and actual employee performance in real-world organizational contexts, rather than simply demonstrating random statistical correlation.

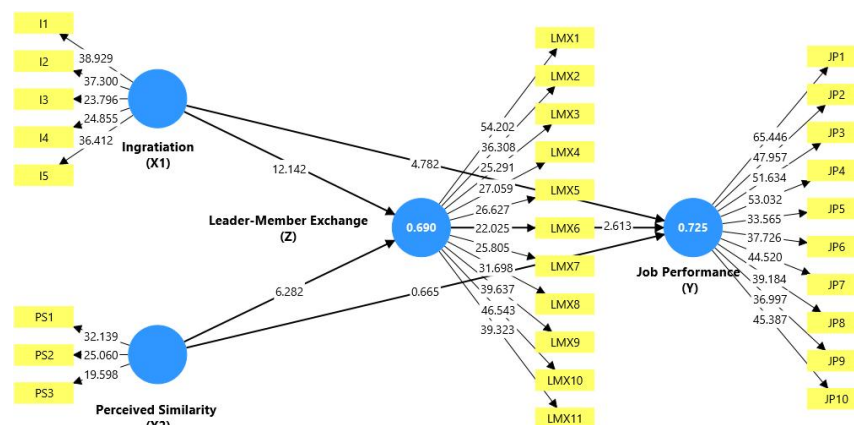


Figure 1. Output Result Bootstrapping

The model shows that Ingratiation (X1) possesses a positive path coefficient of 0.541 with respect to Job Performance, signifying that employees who demonstrate elevated levels of ingratiation behaviors are likely to achieve superior job performance. The elevated coefficient indicates that affirmative interpersonal behaviors towards supervisors can significantly enhance worker's work outcomes. Perceived Similarity (X2) exhibits a positive path coefficient of 0.051 in relation to Job Performance. Despite the positive correlation, the effects is very weak, indicating that congruence in values, attitudes, or traits between employees and supervisors does not significantly improve job performance directly. This suggests that perceived similarity alone may be inadequate to enhance employees' work outcomes in the absence of additional supporting

factors.

Leader-Member Exchange exhibits a positive path coefficient of 0.329 regarding Job Performance, indicating that a superior quality of interaction between leaders and subordinates enhances employee performance. Employees that perceive trust, mutual respect, and support from their bosses are more inclined to execute their tasks effectively and efficiently. The correlation between Ingratiation and Leader-Member Exchange yields a route coefficient of 0.605, indicating the most significant direct influence in the structural model. This discovery demonstrates that Ingratiation practices substantially enhance the formation of high-quality interactions between employees and their managers. Perceived Similarity exhibits a positive coefficient of 0.350 in relation to Leader-Member Exchange, indicating that individuals who recognize higher similarities with their supervisors are likely to cultivate stronger interpersonal interactions in the workplace. The indirect impacts further illustrate the mediating function of Leader-Member Exchange. The indirect effect of ingratiation on job performance via leader-member exchange is 0.199, signifying that a portion of ingratiation's impact on performance functions via enhancing the quality of leader-member exchange connections. Perceived Similarity exerts an indirect effect of 0.115 on Job Performance via Leader-Member Exchange, suggesting that congruence between employees and supervisors might promote performance indirectly by cultivating improved exchange connections. These findings underscore the significant importance of Leader-Member Exchange as a mechanism connecting interpersonal characteristics to employee work performance.

Table 5. Results of Path Coefficient Bootstrapping Direct and Indirect Effect

Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P- Values
Ingratiation -> Job Performance	0.541	0.540	0.113	4.777	0.000
Perceived Similarity -> Job Performance	0.051	0.052	0.077	0.665	0.506
Leader-Member Exchange -> Job Performance	0.329	0.329	0.129	2.550	0.011
Ingratiation -> Leader-Member Exchange	0.605	0.603	0.049	12.386	0.000
Perceived Similarity -> Leader-Member Exchange	0.350	0.353	0.055	6.358	0.000
Ingratiation-> Leader-Member Exchange -> Job Performance	0.199	0.198	0.079	2.516	0.012
Perceived Similarity -> Leader-Member Exchange-> Job Performance	0.115	0.117	0.052	2.218	0.027

Source : Data processed, 2026

The findings of hypothesis testing reveal varying levels of relevance among the suggested direct and indirect linkages. **(H1)**, which investigates the impact of Ingratiation on Job Performance, is statistically validated with a t-value of 4.777 and p-value of 0.000, signifying that Ingratiation has a positive and substantial influence on Job Performance ($p < 0.05$). This research indicates that individuals exhibiting suitable ingratiation behaviors towards their supervisors are

likely to attain superior work performance. Conversely, **(H2)**, which examines the influence of Perceived Similarity on Job Performance, lacks evidence. The association yields a t-value of 0.665 and a p-value of 0.506, surpassing the significance criterion of 0.05. Despite the positive coefficient, the effect lacks statistical significance, suggesting that Perceived Similarity alone does not directly enhance employees Job Performance. This discovery indicates that simply possessing same ideals, attitudes, or traits with managers is inadequate for improving employee performance. From the perspective of SET, mere passive alignment or the possession of similar characteristics does not inherently result in task productivity unless it is actively engaged through professional relationships. Such resemblance may initially enhance the interpersonal interaction with the boss, which subsequently leads to increased job performance through Leader-Member Exchange. **(H3)**, is statistically substantiated, as Leader-Member Exchange exerts a positive and substantial influence on Job Performance, evidenced by a t-value of 2.550 and p-value of 0.011. This outcome underscores that superior connections between leaders and subordinates significantly enhance employee performance through increased trust, support, and mutual respect. The correlation between Ingratiation and Leader-Member Exchange in **(H4)** is robustly substantiated, evidence by a t-value of 12.386 and p-value of 0.000. The results demonstrate that ingratiation has a positive and significant effect on Leader-Member Exchange, implying that employee's favorable interpersonal behaviors enhance their relationships with supervisors. According to SET, strategic impression management serves as a beneficial social catalyst that encourages supervisors to enhance the quality of reciprocal exchanges. Likewise, **(H5)**, which investigates the impact of Perceived Similarity on Leader-Member Exchange, is corroborated, evidenced by a t-value of 6.358 and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that increased perceived similarity between employees and supervisors markedly improves the quality of their exchange relationship. SET posits that similarity functions as a social lubricant, mitigating relational risk and so facilitating the formation of high-quality connections.

The indirect effects indicate that **(H6)**, is supported, as the indirect link between Ingratiation and Job Performance via Leader-Member Exchange is substantial ($t = 2.516$; $p = 0.012$). This discovery suggests that Leader-Member Exchange partially mediates the influence of Ingratiation on Job Performance. Similarly, **(H7)**, is corroborated, as the indirect effect of Perceived Similarity on Job Performance via Leader-Member Exchange produces a ($t = 2.218$; $p = 0.027$). The findings indicate that while Perceived Similarity does not directly affect Job Performance, it can enhance performance indirectly by fortifying the quality of the leader-member exchange. These indirect pathways affirm that with the SET paradigm, interpersonal drivers must be mediated by a high-quality relationship (LMX) to effectively convert into tangible job outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study establishes that in PT. XYZ Indonesia, Ingratiation and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) have significant and positive direct effects on Job Performance, but Perceived Similarity does not directly influence task outcomes. Both Ingratiation and Perceived Similarity significantly enhance the quality of LMX, which subsequently acts as the essential conduit for improving work metrics. These processes corroborate that Social Exchange Theory (SET) framework, illustrating that micro-level interpersonal behaviors must be organized through high-quality connections to effectively translate into measurable workplace productivity. Therefore, firms must fortify communication, trust, and productive supervisor-subordinate interaction networks to address operational accuracy discrepancies and sustainably improve employee performance.

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