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*Impact of Birth Order in the Workplace*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the possibility of a connection between employee birth order (first, middle or last born) in relation to the birth order of their supervisor and whether this relationship could affect Organization Citizenship Behavior (OCB), Leadership Member Exchange (LMX), job satisfaction, and job stress in the workplace. The researcher aims to compare the relationship between the birth order of the subordinate and the supervisor in attempt to understand whether the match between a subordinate and supervisor birth order has any affect in the workplace. Birth order is an uncontrollable demographic variable that affects everyone. In the current workplace environment, most jobs require at least minimal contact with coworkers. An established connection between coworker interactions and birth order could improve relationships between coworkers. The researcher will execute this thesis by (1) using various pieces of literature to learn about OCB, LMX, job satisfaction, job stress, and birth order, and by (2) analyzing data collected from our created survey which assesses OCB, LMX, job satisfaction, job stress, and demographics of both the supervisor and subordinate.

## **Introduction**

For my thesis project, I plan on researching the possibility of a connection between employee birth order (first, middle or last born) in relation to the birth order of their supervisor and whether this relationship could affect Organization Citizenship Behavior (OCB), Leadership Member Exchange (LMX), job satisfaction, and job stress in the workplace. Birth order is an uncontrollable factor that affects everyone. If a relationship between an employee's birth order compared to his or her subordinate's birth order can be established, this could be an uncontrollable, demographic factor influencing relationships and situations in the workplace.

Previous studies regarding birth order primarily looked at the psychological development of children relating to birth order, and personality traits based on each birth order (first born, middle, or last born). Birth order studies conducted about academic achievement resulted in first born children displaying higher academic achievement than latter born children (Onabarniro et al., 2010). A relationship has been found between first borns and the type of leadership roles that they are most likely to hold (Nelson & Harris, 1995). Also previously discovered is that the first borns are less likely to be cohesive in a situation where they are under stress (Weller, 1964).

The previous studies of birth order primarily looked at performance in the academic setting, while in our study we plan on researching birth order and how it affects performance in the workplace. Our study also aims to compare the relationship between the birth order of the subordinate and the supervisor in attempt to understand whether a match between a subordinate and supervisor birth order has any affect in the workplace. In this thesis, we aim to discover if birth order affects individual performance in the workplace, the ideal birth order match between subordinates and supervisors for better performance and job satisfaction, and if in fact individual's birth order effect his or her potential job satisfaction, LMX, OCB, and job stress.

### **Literature Review**

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) can be defined as the extra effort of personal choice put forth by an employee in benefit of the organization he or she is employed by (Williams & Anderson, 1991). In contrast there is Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWB) which is defined as intentional behavior by an employee that threatens the organization (Kaur, 2014). Kaur's research indicated that employees with higher levels of OCB are less likely to be involved in interpersonal conflicts with coworkers. In the current workforce, most jobs require at

least minimal communication and interaction with coworkers. If there is a negative coworker and employee relationship, the workplace can become a more stressful environment triggering interpersonal conflicts to occur (Kaur, 2014). In contrast when employees sense a supportive workplace environment of colleagues, they are more likely to collaborate and communicate thoughts and ideas, creating a stronger community of learning and development (Islam et al., 2013). In his studies, Bolino and colleagues observed the correlation of employees cutting back on OCB when experiencing citizenship fatigue (Bolino et al., 2015). Citizenship fatigue can be defined as conditions in the workplace that control employee level of stress or tiredness caused by engagement in OCB (Bolino et al., 2015). In summary, when OCB is present, employees are more likely to work together and share ideas. Contrary to that, employees who are experiencing a high level of stress are less likely to collaborate or express OCB. Absence of OCB can contribute to a work environment of coworker tension and lack of collaboration, tension and lack of collaboration weakens the workplace environment. In another study, the authors observed that when employees feel stressed out from work responsibilities they are likely to show less organization commitment (Garg & Dhar, 2013). A cycle has now been established between OCB, stress, and workplace commitment. When employees are in conflict with others, employees are less likely to express OCB (Kaur, 2014), when conflict rises workplace stress increases (Kaur, 2014), and when workplace stress increases less collaboration in the workplace is likely to occur (Islam et al., 2013). Finally, with a lack of collaboration employees are less likely to experience organizational commitment (Garg & Dhar, 2013), which translates into lower levels of organizational commitment weaken the chance of OCB in the workplace (Bolino et al., 2015). A focus of this study will be on the assessment of employee birth order effects on OCB and whether the employee to subordinate birth order matching would create high levels of

workplaces stress which eventually would affect the presence of OCB in the workplace. While individually we have some precedence in the decision of where and who we work with, birth order is something every person has that is uncontrollable and unchangeable.

Leadership Member Exchange (LMX) theory describes the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. In the LMX theory, there is an in-group and an out-group, suggesting that leaders do not work with all subordinates in the same way (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). The members of the in-group work closely with the leader and take on more responsibility. As demonstrated by Thomas and his colleagues, stress and burn out increases as the subordinate moves into the in-group. Also observed by Thomas and Lankau is that the organizational benefits of employees experiencing high-quality, supportive relationship with colleagues and supervisors (Thomas & Lankau, 2009). Lou and colleagues suggested that supervisors specifically observe employees' relational identity, signifying the importance of relational identity to group commitment, attitude, and behaviors (Lou et al., 2014).

Research illustrates the importance of the relationship between the supervisor and subordinate and the impact on LMX, group attitudes and behavior, and job satisfaction (Jordan & Troth, 2010; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Lou et al., 2014; Thomas & Lankau, 2009; Volmer & Niessen, 2011). In another study, LMX and job satisfaction were shown to have a reciprocal relationship, meaning the relationship between subordinates and supervisors affecting the employee job satisfaction. A further extension of that would be to assess the impact of birth order in the work place. The aim of this study is to conduct such an assessment. If the birth order of a subordinate and the birth order of a supervisor has effects on the relationships in the workplace, this could also be helpful to understand the impact of it on LMX and job satisfaction. For instance, job attitude's effect on employee's ability to experience a high levels of LMX is

previously established (Volmer & Niessen, 2011). Hence, employees are influenced by characteristics outside of their control. Based on our future research, birth order may be shown to be another characteristic outside the control of supervisors and subordinates that has a potential to influence the workplace environment.

Birth order can be described as the realm regarding order of birth compared to potential other children in the family. For centuries, research surrounding birth order has most significantly focused on the psychological development due to birth order. One variable that has been studied is academic achievement. First born children perform better academically than latter born children. This is often linked to the individual attention given by parents before the latter siblings are born (Onabarniro et al., 2010). As an extension and in parallel to sociological based research, our study, will concentrate on birth order in the workplace such as leadership style and cohesiveness surrounding birth order. Studies have shown that firstborns are more likely to conform to the opinion of a group in situations where social pressure exists. In situations where the leader needs consensus of the group, firstborns more often act as leaders, whereas, in situations where a leader is required to rely on self-sufficient attitudes, first-borns are less likely to act as leaders (Nelson & Harris, 1995). The relationship between birth order and cohesiveness has a direct relationship to the levels of anxiety in a situation. In situations of high anxiety, firstborn children are less likely to be cohesive while with latter-born children cohesiveness did not change with anxiety levels (Weller, 1964). This research leaves open questions regarding the relationship between birth orders, the type of leadership being held by a supervisor and their respective birth order, the subordinate's birth order, and the level of stress surrounding these respective positions. If a first born is put in a supervisor role with heavy stress relying on self-sufficient attitudes, this could result in less cohesiveness (Weller, 1964). The lack

of cohesiveness would most likely to result in lack of collaboration (Islam et al.,2013); with a lack of collaboration employees are less likely to experience organizational commitment (Kaur, 2014). This, as mentioned previously, not only affects OCB but also LMX, group attitudes and behavior, and job satisfaction.

Studies regarding birth order revolve around certain demographic variances where birth order studies are less likely to apply. This is including but not limited to significant age gap between siblings and significant family life style change or event in between births (Leman, 2004). It is to be noted that research regarding birth order has yet to discover any concrete universal findings where variances do not affect birth order results.

Based on all of this, we believe that employee-subordinate birth order is an understudied phenomenon. To be more specific, we aim to address these questions: Does birth order have an effect on how an individual performs in the workplace? What kind of a match between subordinate and supervisor is needed for better workplace performance/ job satisfaction? Is there a difference between people of different birth order and job satisfaction, LMX and OCB?

## **Methodology**

In an effort to assess the thesis statement of this study, the researcher must research significant areas of management regarding birth order. This is including but not limited to LMX, OCB, job satisfaction, and workplace stress. Key journals such as the *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *The Journal of Social Psychology*, and *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* are all information sources that contain prior observations and research that will be helpful to the study of birth order in the workplace. The Birth Order Book by Kevin Leman will be used for background information regarding the

study of birth order. Together these sources along with any additional helpful sources found will be used to help create a survey that will be used for research regarding this study.

Additionally to the information gained through these journals and books, the researcher will create a survey that analyses LMX, OCB, job satisfaction, stress, and demographics of the individual and immediate supervisor. LMX will be analyzed from the research scale created by Liden and Maslyn, previously referenced in this paper. Questions are based on four different categories affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). OCB will be analyzed from a series of questions from the scale created by Williams and Anderson. These include a variety of questions that are directed toward the organization (OCB-O) and directed towards the individual (OCB-I) (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Stress will be measured by the scale developed by Motowidlo and his colleagues (1986). In order to gain information on relations between birth orders, demographic information regarding birth order of subordinate and supervisor will also be connected. The information regarding demographics will be used as a control variable in the study.

We aim for a sample size of 200 full time, working, adult, graduate students at Texas A&M University- Commerce. Data collected will be analyzed using techniques such as regression and basic correlation analysis with SPSS as a software and an online data collection tool called, Qualtrix. By analyzing this information, we will be able to determine the impact of birth order on LMX, OCB, job satisfaction, and stress in the workplace.

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