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Article

What drives performance while being far away from home? An examination of leader-member exchange (LMX) ambivalence, job embeddedness, trust, and perceived organisation support of Thai seafarers

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What drives performance while being far away from home? An examination of leader-member exchange (LMX) ambivalence, job embeddedness, trust, and perceived organisation support of Thai seafarers

Kevalin Puangyoykeaw Setthakorn^{1*}

Abstract: This study investigates the determinants of performance among Thai seafarers working away from their homes using regression and moderated-mediation analyses. We examined the influence of leader-member exchange (LMX) ambivalence, job embeddedness, trust, and perceived organisational support (POS) on seafarers' performance. Using a survey questionnaire, data were collected from 175 Thai seafarers. Results suggest that LMX ambivalence is a better predictor of performance than traditional LMX. Further, the moderated-mediation analysis reveal that trust and job embeddedness significantly contribute to enhanced performance, whereas the effects of LMX ambivalence and perceived organisational support demonstrate unexpected patterns. Moreover, the moderated-mediation analysis sheds light on the interplay between these factors, providing valuable insights into their combined impact on seafarers' performance. Our findings emphasise the critical importance of trust-building initiatives and job embeddedness programs in optimising seafarers' contributions to the maritime sector.

Subjects: Asian Studies; Work & Organizational Psychology; Business, Management and Accounting;



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Keywords: seafarer; performance; LMX ambivalence; job embeddedness; trust; moderated mediation; Thailand

1. Introduction

Seafarers' work distinguishes them from shore-based workers. Seafarers' work is demanding and often requires extended periods away from home, exposure to harsh weather conditions, and other hazards at sea. Seafarers serve as the vital human resource of ship companies and play a crucial role in driving the global logistics system and the world economy (Carotenuto et al., 2012; Oldenburg et al., 2010). While previous research has primarily focused on seafarers' psychological well-being and mental health, the significance, importance, and potential impact of management research have been overlooked. A ship not only resembles an organisation with its employees, but also serves as a home for these employees. Seafarers must work and reside on ships throughout their contracts, enduring long periods of time without returning home or seeing their families. This unique work environment presents several challenges. Seafarers bear the responsibility of ensuring the care of products for the product owner, the boat for the boat owner, and most importantly, the well-being of themselves and their colleagues onboard during their prolonged stays and challenging weather conditions. Therefore, prioritising and supporting seafarers is crucial for shipping companies. If seafarers perform well in a supportive work environment, they can ensure the future profitability of shipping companies and enable sustainable business operations. Despite extensive research on performance, limited attention has been paid to understanding the unique workforce groups operating far from home under exceptional work conditions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the factors that drive performance among seafarers working in remote locations. Performance, as defined in this study, is a broad concept that encompasses both task and contextual performance. Generalising this term is essential for a more comprehensive and holistic evaluation of an individual's contributions to the workplace. This approach recognises employees not only for their core job duties, but also for their contributions to teamwork, innovation, and a positive work environment. Specifically, it explores the role of leader-member exchange (LMX) ambivalence, job embeddedness, trust, and perceived organisational support in shaping the performance outcomes of seafarers. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of survey data collected from a sample of Thai seafarers, this study sheds light on the intricate dynamics and determinants of performance in this distinct work context.

Despite advancements in onboard equipment and modern technology, seafarers remain the primary focus of ship companies, to retain their workforce and ensure efficient operations (Bagoulla & Guillotreau, 2016; Cahoon & Haugstetter, 2008). The global shipping industry relies heavily on seafarers who endure long periods of separation from their homes and families while providing their services. Previous studies have revealed that seafarers experience high levels of work-related stress because of this extended separation, which can lead to accidents, work dissatisfaction, and decreased productivity (Carotenuto et al., 2012; Iversen, 2012; Thai & Latta, 2010). Understanding the factors that influence seafarers' performance under these challenging conditions is of utmost importance for the industry's smooth operation and success, both from a practical and research standpoint.

A recent study by A.G. Lee et al. (2019) introduced a new theoretical concept called LMX ambivalence, derived from the original leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, which has attracted attention from researchers worldwide as a potential improvement over the original theory. The new concept considers LMX quality to have both positive and negative aspects within the leader-follower relationship. Unlike traditional work settings, seafarers' leader-follower dyads must remain together 24/7, which presents unique mental challenges and strains in maintaining their relationships. Another important theory in the field of organisational behaviour is job embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001). This theory explains the factors that keep employees attached to their jobs by incorporating multiple interconnected forces that bind them to their positions. Job embeddedness has been recognised as a better predictor of turnover than

conventional variables, such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment. However, seafarers do not necessarily adhere to the organisation-centric perspective of this theory, posing a challenge to the existing literature's understanding of individuals who work remotely. Another research area that has received limited attention is the exploration of how employees manage ambivalence and the contextual factors that moderate its effects. Methot et al. (2017) highlight the need for further investigation of the boundary conditions that may mitigate or exacerbate the links between ambivalent relationships and work outcomes. Therefore, this study investigates the roles of trust, job embeddedness, and perceived organisational support as moderators and mediators in this specific workforce. Trust pertains to an individual's willingness to feel secure in others based on the belief that they will provide credibility attentively. Perceived organisational support signifies employees' perceptions of an organisation's provision of various aspects of support through its policies. If individuals on boards possess high levels of job embeddedness, trust, and recognition of organisational support, they are likely to enhance their work efficiency. Studying job embeddedness, trust, and perceived organisational support (POS) alongside LMX ambivalence in seafarer performance research offers a holistic view. Collectively, these variables provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of remote working systems. Their interconnectedness enriches insights, and their practical relevance aids organisations. Notably, to the best of our knowledge, this study represents pioneering work, as there is a lack of prior studies examining these variables in the context of seafarers. Their alignment with the existing literature and potential applicability across cultures make this research both valuable and transferable, contributing to a nuanced understanding of performance factors in remote work settings.

The seafaring profession is highly specialised and requires experience and patience. Working far from home presents unique and challenging circumstances for employees. Seafarers with extensive experience, skills, and knowledge, as emphasised by Bagoulla and Guillotreau (2016), are true assets for countries, industries, and organisations, and their positive influence contributes to improved performance and benefits boat companies. This study focuses on Thai seafarers owing to their substantial impact on the global maritime sector. Thailand's pivotal role as a supplier of seafaring labour renders it invaluable characteristics for examination. Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an immensely burgeoning trade and economic sphere, Thailand serves as a geographic nexus for regional transportation. The nation's bountiful marine resources are a vital component of its economy, positioning it amongst the world's primary fishery product producers and exporters. Consequently, investigating the determinants of Thai seafarer performance has the potential to bolster the prosperity of the nation as a whole.

With the aim of contributing to the scholarly community, this study has both theoretical and empirical significance. Theoretically, it advances knowledge by exploring a relatively uncharted area of organisational psychology, potentially contributing to the development or refinement of existing theories related to remote work. These findings may have broader applicability beyond the specific context of this study. Empirically, this study offers practical insights for organisations. It provides a foundation for evidence-based decision making, guiding resource allocation, support structures, and training for remote workers. Organisations excelling in managing remote employees may gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining talent, particularly in the maritime industry, where remote work is prevalent. In summary, this study can shape future research, refine theories, and offer practical solutions for organisations regarding significant factors influencing employee performance while being far from home.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. *Leader-member exchange ambivalence and its relationship with performance*

Based on the fundamental concept of leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, which emphasises how leaders differentiate in their treatment of followers, resulting in varying qualities of relationships, researchers have explored the notion of ambivalence in leader-follower dyads (A.G. Lee et al., 2019). Ambivalence refers to the simultaneous experience of both positive and negative orientations towards

a person, relationship, or entity (Lian et al., 2012). This phenomenon has been observed across various types of relationships, including spousal relationships, friendships, and co-workers, owing to the complexity of human connections, power dynamics, conflicting needs and expectations, emotional complexity, and the presence of imperfections and inconsistencies. These factors contribute to contrasting thoughts and emotions within relationships as individuals navigate through different roles, dependencies, and desires (Van Harreveld et al., 2015). Recognising and managing ambivalence are important for maintaining healthy and fulfilling relationships. Understanding LMX ambivalence is particularly important for seafarers working far away from home. These individuals face unique challenges owing to the nature of their work, which involves long periods away from their families and loved ones. Consequently, the leader-follower relationship assumes greater significance for seafarers, as leaders become their primary source of support, guidance, and social interaction during their time at sea. Followers may experience mixed feelings or conflicting perceptions regarding their leaders' qualities, actions, or decisions. Koy and Yeo (2008) suggested that relational ambivalence can lead to conflicting thoughts and negative emotions that hinder followers' job performance.

Several factors contribute to the development of ambivalence within leader-follower relationships. Firstly, interpersonal relationship studies suggest that dyadic ambivalence increases when there is a sense of dependence on the relationship (Fingerman et al., 2008). In the LMX context, followers often rely on leaders for career advancement and access to valuable resources. Power imbalance and the followers' need for autonomy can create friction, leading to ambivalent relationship cognition. The notion of ambivalence is particularly pronounced in the seafarer-leader relationship. Reliance on leaders in a demanding and isolated work environment can intensify the power imbalance between leaders and seafarers, amplifying the potential for ambivalent relationship cognition. Furthermore, the inherent complexities and uncertainties of the maritime industry, coupled with job demands, can lead to inconsistent leadership behaviours or discrepancies between leaders' actions and seafarers' expectations. These discrepancies can further fuel ambivalence in the seafarer-leader relationship.

Second, leaders and followers assume multiple organisational roles within the dyad, such as supervisors, subordinates, co-workers, and friends (Ashforth et al., 2014). Balancing expectations and norms associated with these roles can create relational ambivalence. The multifaceted nature of relationships within organisations, involving both personal and professional aspects, further contributes to ambivalent perceptions. For example, conflicting demands from managers can coexist with emotional support, leading to ambivalence. Finally, individuals may maintain ambivalent relationships because of real or perceived barriers that hold them together (Bushman & Holt-Lunstad, 2009). These barriers can be external (e.g. lack of alternatives) or internal (e.g. commitment to the relationship) and exert pressure on individuals to continue the relationship. In the case of leader-follower relationships, employees may perceive strong external barriers that discourage them from leaving ambivalent relationships despite the interpersonal stress involved.

Contemplating these considerations, it is evident that LMX relationships possess a certain level of ambivalence. Extensive research has demonstrated the relationship between LMX and employee performance, with meta-analyses indicating a positive association between high-quality LMX relationships and task performance (Martin et al., 2016). However, the exploration of LMX ambivalence is relatively new and research on this topic remains limited. Understanding the heightened presence of ambivalence within the seafarer-leader relationship, especially in the context of working far from home, is essential for addressing the unique challenges faced by seafarers. In support of Lee et al. (2019) proposition that LMX ambivalence has distinct effects on task performance beyond overall LMX quality, this study aims to validate these claims by investigating its impact on task performance and comparing its predictive value to traditional LMX variables. Recognising and effectively managing ambivalence can contribute to the well-being and job performance of seafarers while fostering positive and supportive dynamics between leaders and followers in this specific context. Based on the existing literature, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1a: LMX ambivalence has a negative impact on seafarer performance.

Hypothesis 1b: LMX ambivalence is a superior predictor of performance than traditional LMX quality in the case of seafarers.

2.2. Trust as a mediator between LMX & performance

Examining the mediating role of trust in the LMX and performance relationship holds particular relevance for seafarers working in a unique and challenging environment far from home. Their work requires them to undergo extended periods of separation from their families, and face numerous physical, emotional, and psychological demands. In this context, trust becomes a critical study variable, as it shapes the dynamics between seafarers and their leaders, influencing their well-being, job satisfaction, and ultimately performance. Cultivating and upholding trust between leaders and seafarers is of paramount importance for developing a favourable work atmosphere and mitigating potential challenges stemming from distinct work conditions. In the well-regarded research conducted by Martin et al. (2016) involving a comprehensive meta-analysis of LMX and performance, it has been suggested that trust in the leader possesses the capacity to function as a mediator in the LMX-performance relationship.

When seafarers have a high level of trust in their leaders, they can alleviate feelings of isolation, enhance job engagement, and experience a sense of security and support. Trust enables effective communication, collaboration, and cooperation among seafarers and their leaders, facilitating smoother operations and higher levels of performance despite the challenges posed by the remote and isolated work environment. Conversely, a lack of trust can exacerbate the challenging conditions faced by seafarers. Reduced trust may lead to increased stress, decreased motivation, and lower job satisfaction, ultimately affecting performance and wellbeing. Without trust, seafarers may hesitate to seek support, voice concerns, or engage fully in work, thus hindering their ability to perform optimally.

Research on the mediating role of trust in LMX and performance relationship within unique work environments, such as those of seafarers is limited. However, the literature acknowledges the importance of trust in enhancing wellbeing and performance in challenging work settings. When trust is high, subordinates are more inclined to perceive their leaders as reliable, credible, and competent, thereby exhibiting greater adherence to leadership guidance, information sharing, and effective collaboration. As a result, performance tends to improve at both the individual (e.g. task performance and job satisfaction) and team levels (e.g. team cohesion, coordination, and goal attainment). Conversely, low levels of trust can engender subordinates' scepticism towards their leaders' intentions, leading to reduced engagement and cooperation, and subsequently decreased performance and productivity. Overall, the mediating role of trust highlights it as a key explanatory factor in the relationship between LMX and performance. High-quality leader-member relationships foster trust, which in turn enhances individual and team performance. Trust serves as a comprehensive mediator that encompasses not only the positive psychological influence exerted by leaders on members but also the provision of tangible and intangible resources and support from leaders to members (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Therefore, trust should be regarded as a mediator rather than a moderator in the LMX-performance relationship, as it elucidates the process through which LMX influences performance outcomes. Based on the above literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Trust will mediate the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance among seafarers, such that high-quality ambivalent LMX relationships will foster trust, which in turn will positively influence performance.

2.3. Job embeddedness as moderator between LMX & performance

Mitchell et al. (2001) introduced the concept of job embeddedness to encompass the various factors that influence an individual's decision to remain in their current job. Empirical research

by Ng and Feldman (2009) demonstrated that job embeddedness affects work-related behaviours such as turnover, performance, absenteeism, and citizenship behaviours. Unlike traditional attitudinal measures, such as satisfaction or commitment, job embeddedness offers a more comprehensive perspective on the employee-employer relationship, capturing the psychological, social, and financial influences that contribute to employee retention. Job embeddedness is a combination of material, financial, and psychological factors that deter individuals from leaving their jobs. Workplace friendships can enhance job embeddedness by fostering social connections, perception of fit, and greater reluctance to leave work friends, even in the presence of new job opportunities. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing body of research on job embeddedness. Lee et al. (2004) also found a direct relationship between job embeddedness and performance, although the effect size varied from moderate to weak. Job embeddedness is believed to promote task performance through an anti-withdrawal mechanism. However, it should be noted that higher job embeddedness itself does not necessarily motivate individuals to perform tasks better beyond its anti-withdrawal effects. Consequently, the direct effects of job embeddedness on task performance are expected to be weaker than those of other important frameworks for employee performance (Sekiguchi et al., 2008).

While job embeddedness primarily concerns job stability and why people choose to stay, its impact on task performance is predominantly indirect rather than direct (Sekiguchi et al., 2008). Job embeddedness can moderate the relationship between LMX quality and task performance. Specifically, high-quality LMX is associated with higher task performance when employees have high levels of job embeddedness compared to those with lower levels. Employees with high-quality LMX receive better support and resources from their supervisors, such as increased authority, specialised information, and mentoring opportunities, which enable them to perform their tasks effectively. However, highly embedded employees may not be motivated to exceed minimum task performance levels because of their anti-withdrawal intentions. Therefore, the direct effect of job embeddedness on task performance is expected to be weaker than that of LMX.

As suggested by Sekiguchi et al. (2008), high job embeddedness can be a “double-edged sword” and may contribute to employee performance only under certain conditions. Conversely, in situations with low-quality LMX, negative aspects of job embeddedness may emerge as individuals become bound to unfavourable circumstances. Resolving low-quality LMX may not be easy, but employees’ links, fit, and sacrifices make them hesitant to leave their current jobs or organisations. Consequently, employees with high job embeddedness may feel “stuck” in their current job and organisation, perceiving it as difficult to escape from poor social exchange relationships with their supervisors. This feeling is particularly relevant for seafarers who spend extended periods of time on ships. Although job embeddedness has the potential to facilitate task performance, low-quality LMX, characterised by inadequate supervisory support and lack of reciprocal obligation, hinders employees from capitalising on these advantages. Instead, they may experience a significant discrepancy between their high job embeddedness and the poor quality of their LMX, leading to stress and negative reactions that reduce their efforts toward task performance. Based on the above literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: In the case of seafarers, job embeddedness moderates the positive relationship between LMX ambivalence and task performance in such a way that the relationship will be stronger for individuals with higher levels of job embeddedness than for those with lower levels.

2.4. Perceived organisation support as a moderator between LMX & performance

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) refers to the extent to which employees perceive that their organisation values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Research has demonstrated that POS is negatively associated with workplace strain and

positively associated with job-related affects, such as job satisfaction and mood, by minimising negative reactions to stressors (Eisenberger et al., 2001). For seafarers who face extended periods of separation from their families and homes, POS is particularly important because of the unique challenges they encounter, including isolation, loneliness, and work-related stress. POS plays a crucial role for seafarers in several ways. First, it creates a supportive work environment by providing resources, information, and emotional support, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and reducing stress. Second, it reduces role ambiguity by clarifying job responsibilities and ensuring access to the necessary resources, which contributes to higher job performance. Finally, POS fosters social support and positive relationships with colleagues and superiors; buffers against isolation; and promotes teamwork, cooperation, and overall performance. Although LMX ambivalence differs from abusive supervision, social support from sources external to the leader-follower relationship is expected to buffer the negative effects of LMX ambivalence on employee performance. By perceiving high levels of organisational support, seafarers are likely to experience an amplified positive impact of good LMX on their performance. High POS can enhance LMX's effectiveness by reinforcing positive attitudes, trust, and mutual exchange between seafarers and their leaders, thereby positively influencing seafarers' motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, and overall performance. Based on the above literature, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between LMX ambivalence and task performance is moderated by POS, such that the negative effect is reduced when POS is high.

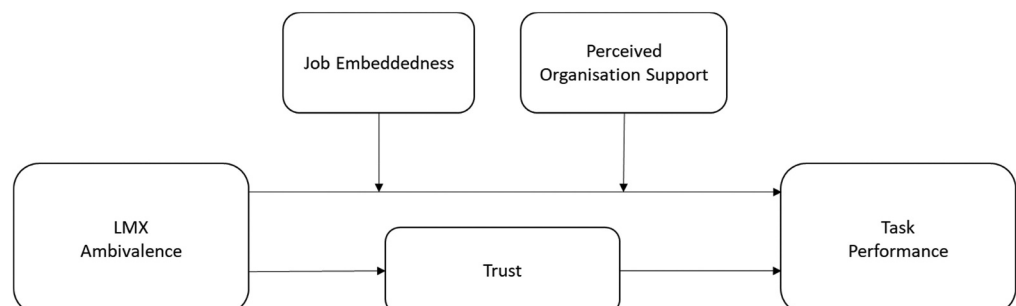
Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the study.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Participants and procedures

This study employed a quantitative research design utilising a cross-sectional survey to collect data from Thai seafarers who have been employed by various shipping companies operating in international water bodies. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique, targeting seafarers who have worked away from home for extended periods. Purposive sampling is employed when the research aims to select individuals with distinctive characteristics. Given the challenging nature of locating seafarers owing to the nature of their work, the survey questionnaires were initiated through a snowballing approach, wherein participants were referred to the study by others. The survey questionnaire included validated scales to measure variables of interest. The final sample comprised of 175 seafarers. The link to the online survey was sent to the seafarers through their networks. After providing informed consent, participants completed the online survey. Of these respondents, 175 were male (100%), and the data for these matched sets were used for statistical analyses. SPSS software was used for descriptive and regression analyses. Additionally, we employed the PROCESS macro (Models 1 and 4) developed by Hayes (2013) for the moderated-mediation analysis.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.



3.2. Measures

All scale items originally in English were translated into Thai and back-translated by two bilingual (English-Thai) speakers to ensure semantic equivalence. The survey included measures for all studied variables and several control variables. All the measuring instruments employed in this study used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

We used seven items from Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1995) LMX7 measure to assess LMX. Participants rated the perceived quality of their relationships with their immediate supervisors. An example is, "I have enough confidence in my leader that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so".

LMX ambivalence was measured using seven items from newly development LMX ambivalence measure introduced by A.G. Lee et al. (2019). The ambivalence scale aims to assess the degree to which an individual had conflicting thoughts about the relationship with their direct supervisors or managers. An example is, "I have conflicting thoughts; sometimes I think that my working relationship with my manager is very good, while at other times I don't".

Six items by Cook and Wall (1980) were used to measure trust. An example is, "If I get into difficulties at work, I know my workmates would try and help me out".

The scale to measure organisational job embeddedness was adapted from the global embeddedness items developed by Crossley et al. (2007). This seven-item embeddedness measure represents the general level of "on-the-job" embeddedness of an employee in an organisation. An example is, "I feel attached to this organisation".

Perceived organisation support was measured through six items by Eisenberger et al. (2001). An example is, "My organisation takes pride in my accomplishments at work".

Individual work performance questionnaire (IWPQ) scale by Koopmans (2015) comprising of 18 items was used to measure performance. An example is, "I managed to plan my work so that I finished it on time".

We controlled for LMX quality to determine the independent effect of LMX ambivalence on performance beyond that explained by the overall quality of the relationship. Additionally, we controlled for several demographic variables, like age, gender, and dyadic tenure because they have been shown to affect contextual and task performance (Green et al., 2009; Ng & Feldman, 2009). Gender was measured using a dichotomous variable, where 0 indicated a male respondent and 1 indicated a female respondent. Marital status was measured using self-reported items on a three-point scales, denominated as single, married, and divorced or separated. Participants' ages and tenure were recorded in terms of years.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

In this study, all participants were male. Further, majority of the participants (74.8 %) were within the age range of 31 to 50 years old. Regarding marital status, 56% of the respondents were married and 41.7% were single. Furthermore, a significant proportion (74.9 %) hold a bachelor's degree. Additionally, 37.7% had 11–20 years of experience.

Table 1 presents the item intercorrelations, reliabilities, and descriptive statistics of all independent and dependent variables used in this study. Notably, all variables demonstrated good reliability. None of the correlation coefficients between the variables surpass the 0.8 threshold, thus implying that the dataset is devoid of multicollinearity concerns. When examining the correlations between

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistencies of the variables								
Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Performance	3.66	0.51	(.87)					
2. LMX Quality	3.69	0.69	.41**	(.90)				
3. LMX Ambivalence	3.18	0.78	.35**	.11	(.94)			
4. Job Embeddedness	3.15	1.07	.43**	.21**	.28**	(.96)		
5. Trust	3.89	0.62	.43**	.40**	.07	.18*	(.89)	
6. Support	3.28	0.89	.46**	.45**	.27**	.46**	.43**	(.94)

Note: N = 175. Values in parentheses indicate Cronbach alphas. *p < .05, **p < .01.

performance and the studied variables, there is a positive correlation between performance and LMX quality ($r=0.41$), LMX ambivalence ($r=0.35$), job embeddedness ($r=0.43$), trust ($r=0.43$), and perceived organisational support ($r=0.46$). However, LMX ambivalence does not demonstrate statistically significant correlations with LMX quality and trust ($r=0.11$, $r=0.07$, and $p>0.05$, respectively).

4.2. Hypothesis testing

4.2.1. LMX ambivalence and LMX

To test Hypothesis 1a, a regression analysis was performed, as depicted in Table 2. The results show that LMX ambivalence has a significant effect on seafarer performance. However, the direction of this effect is contrary to that suggested in previous studies. Surprisingly, seafarers experiencing higher levels of LMX ambivalence demonstrate better performance ($\beta=.345$, $p<0.00$). Consequently, Hypothesis 1a is rejected.

Hypothesis 1b aims to determine whether LMX ambivalence is a better predictor of performance than traditional LMX quality among seafarers. The results are presented in Table 3. After accounting for age and tenure as control variables, it was found that LMX ambivalence ($\beta=.324$, $p<0.01$) significantly and positively contributes to the prediction of performance. The addition of LMX ambivalence led to an incremental improvement in the prediction of performance, as indicated by a change in R^2 (ΔR^2) of .103 and adjusted R^2 ($\Delta \text{Adj.} R^2$) of .101. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b is supported and accepted.

4.2.2. Mediating analysis

This study uses Preacher and Hayes (2004) approach to examine the impact of LMX ambivalence on performance through trust. The PROCESS macro (Model 4) by Hayes (2013) was employed, utilising 20,000 bootstrap samples at a 95% confidence interval (CI) to analyse the relationships between the constructs.

The analysis involved a three-step procedure. First, the total-effect model was tested by examining the direct relationship between the predictor (LMX ambivalence) and the outcome variable (performance) without considering the mediator (trust). The results showed a significant relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance ($\beta=0.225$, $p<0.00$). Next, the relationships between the predictor (LMX ambivalence) and the mediator (trust) and between the mediator (trust) and the outcome variable (performance) were assessed. The results indicated significant relationships between LMX ambivalence and trust ($\beta=0.057$, $p<0.00$) and between the mediator and performance ($\beta=0.352$, $p<0.00$).

Finally, we examined the indirect effect, which signifies the role of trust as a mediator in the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance. The results revealed a significant indirect effect of LMX ambivalence on performance when controlling for trust ($\beta=0.029$, $p<0.00$), confirming the presence of mediation. The bootstrapping results further supported this mediation effect, as the confidence interval for the indirect effect of LMX ambivalence on performance through trust did not include zero (CI = -0.047 to -0.111), confirming that there is a mediation effect to report.

Table 2. Result of regression analysis of LMX ambivalence on performance

Variables	<i>b</i>	β
(Constant)	2.946	
LMX-Ambivalence	.225	.345**
R^2		.119
Adj. R^2		.114

Note. N = 175, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$.

Table 3. Results of hierarchical linear regression analysis of LMX and LMX ambivalence on performance

Variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	θ	<i>b</i>	θ
(Constant)	2.736		2.176	
Age	-.135	-.238*	-.159	-.280**
Tenure	.088	.214*	.110	.266**
LMX	.289	.389**	.261	.351**
LMX-Ambivalence			.211	.324**
R^2		.194		.296
ΔR^2				.103
Adj. R^2		.179		.280
Δ Adj. R^2				.101
<i>F</i>		13.685**		17.881**
ΔF				24.765

Note. N = 175, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Thus, Hypothesis 2 (H2) is supported, indicating that trust acts as a mediator in the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance. The detailed results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 4.

4.2.3. Moderation analysis

This study investigates the moderating effects of job embeddedness and perceived organisational support (POS) on the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 1). The coefficients of the moderating effects are presented in Table 5.

The results revealed that job embeddedness has a positive and statistically significant moderating effect ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.00$). The bootstrapping analysis further confirmed this effect, as the confidence interval for the moderating effect (CI = 0.04 to 0.18) did not include zero. The interaction term of job embeddedness with LMX ambivalence accounted for an additional 4% of the variance in performance beyond the main effects. Although the effect size may seem small, Mellor (1992) argued that even a 1% increase in R^2 is not trivial. Consequently, Hypothesis 3 is supported, indicating that job embeddedness moderates the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance.

Table 4. Result of mediation analysis

Paths	β	SE	<i>t</i>	LLCI	ULCI
LMX ambivalence → trust	0.06**	0.06	18.85**	-0.06	0.18
Trust → performance	0.33**	0.05	6.26**	0.23	0.44
LMX ambivalence → performance	0.21**	0.04	4.88**	0.12	0.29
Total effect	0.23**	0.05	4.84**	0.13	0.32
Bootstrapping		Effect	Boot SE	Boot LL 95% CI	Boot UL 95% CI
Indirect effect		0.0292	0.0402	-0.0474	-0.1110

Note(s): ** $p < 0.00$; Bootstrap sample size = 20,000; LL = Lower limit; UL = Upper Limit; CI = Confidence interval.

Table 5. Result of moderation analysis						
Paths		Performance				
		β	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI
Job embeddedness	Constant	3.67**	0.39	9.52**	2.91	4.44
	LMX ambivalence	-0.18	0.12	-1.49	-0.42	0.06
	Job embeddedness	-0.17	0.12	-1.43	-0.40	0.06
	LMX ambivalence x job embeddedness	0.11**	0.04	3.01**	0.04	0.18
	R ²	0.28				
	ΔR^2	0.04				
	F	9.05**				
POS	Constant	3.07**	0.43	7.11**	2.22	3.93
	LMX ambivalence	-0.07	0.14	-0.48	-0.35	0.22
	Perceived organisation support (POS)	0.05	0.12	0.39	-0.19	0.28
	LMX ambivalence x POS	0.06	0.04	1.64	-0.01	0.14
	R ²	0.28				
	ΔR^2	0.01				
	F	2.67				
Note(s): **p < 0.00; Bootstrap sample size = 20,000; LL = Lower limit; UL = Upper Limit; CI = Confidence interval.						

However, the moderating effect of perceived organisational support (POS) on the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance was found to be insignificant. Consequently, Hypothesis 4 related to the moderating effect of perceived organisational support is rejected.

5. Discussion

Table 6 provides a comprehensive summary of our research findings, displaying the results for hypotheses 1 to 4. Hypotheses 1b, 2, and 3 were supported and are consistent with the existing literature. Specifically, our results revealed that LMX ambivalence outperforms traditional LMX quality as a predictor of seafarers' performance. The complexity of human emotions, particularly ambivalence, offers valuable insight into performance dynamics. Furthermore, we found evidence supporting the role of trust as a mediator between LMX and seafarer's performance. High-quality LMX relationships foster trust, which in turn, positively influences performance. This outcome is not surprising, because trust becomes particularly significant when individuals are far away from home. A strong sense of trust can enhance performance levels under such circumstances. Similarly, the concept of job embeddedness has demonstrated an impact on seafarers' performance. The feeling of belonging and having limited alternatives outside their current job positively contributed to their dedication and hard work, ultimately leading to improved performance.

The outcomes of our study contradict those of prior studies, leading to the rejection of hypotheses 1a and 4. Surprisingly, we found a positive association between LMX ambivalence and performance, contrary to the expected negative relationship. This unexpected finding can be attributed to the complexity of LMX ambivalence, as supported by the literature that emphasises its nuanced effects on social relationships. Employees experiencing LMX ambivalence may be motivated to seek validation and demonstrate higher commitment, as seen in research on self-verification motives (Frazier et al., 2004). Additionally, adaptability and resilience develop in ambivalent relationships and the role of the leader's management style in fostering constructive environments may contribute to enhanced performance (Dvir et al., 2002). Furthermore, differences in the sample characteristics can also play a role in understanding the complexities of social relationships, highlighting the importance of considering these factors (Ibarra et al., 2019). As the study of LMX ambivalence continues to evolve, further investigation of contextual variables, leadership behaviours, and employee traits is necessary to comprehend the mechanisms underlying this surprising positive relationship (O'Mara et al., 2015).

Table 6. Summary of results

Hypotheses	Results
1a: LMX ambivalence has a negative impact on seafarer performance.	Rejected
1b: LMX ambivalence is a superior predictor of performance compared to traditional LMX quality in the case of seafarers.	Accepted
2: Trust will mediate the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance among seafarers, such that high-quality LMX relationships will foster trust, which in turn will positively influence performance.	Accepted
3: In the case of seafarers, job embeddedness will moderate the positive relationship between LMX ambivalence and task performance in such a way that the relationship will be stronger for individuals with higher levels of job embeddedness compared to those with lower levels.	Accepted
4: The relationship between LMX ambivalence and task performance will be moderated by POS, such that the negative effect will be reduced when POS is high.	Rejected

Our study yields a highly unexpected result, as we reject the hypothesis that the relationship between LMX ambivalence and task performance is moderated by perceived organisational support (POS), leading to a reduction in the negative effect when POS is high. Several factors might have accounted for this unexpected outcome. The specific organisational context and unique characteristics of the participants in our study might have contributed to these unexpected findings. Seafarers face distinct challenges including prolonged separation from home and constantly changing work environments, which could interact with LMX ambivalence and performance in ways not fully captured by perceived organisational support alone. Additionally, onboard social support and camaraderie among crew members might play significant roles in shaping performance, potentially overshadowing the moderating impact of perceived organisational support.

Given these surprising results, more in-depth research is required to better understand the underlying mechanisms shaping the relationship between LMX ambivalence and task performance. The unique context of maritime work may necessitate a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of performance, including the potential role of personal resilience, interpersonal relationships on the board, and the organisation's adaptability to meet the specific needs of seafarers.

Our study underscores the relevance of these psychological factors in the maritime context and provides valuable insights for enhancing seafarers' performance. Understanding the nuances of emotions, trust, and job embeddedness can help organisations and leaders implement targeted strategies to promote well-being and optimise performance in this unique work environment.

6. Conclusion and research implications

Based on the findings that LMX ambivalence is a superior predictor of performance compared to traditional LMX and that it has a positive association with performance, along with the role of trust as a mediator and job embeddedness as a moderator, several recommended strategies can be implemented to boost seafarers' performance. First, organisations should prioritise building strong and positive relationships between leaders and seafarers to enhance trust among the crew. Regular feedback sessions and support mechanisms can foster trust and positively influence performance. Second, strategies that enhance seafarers' sense of belongingness and commitment to their work should be implemented, because job embeddedness plays a crucial moderating role. Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment, providing opportunities for skill development, and acknowledging the value of seafarers' contributions can increase their commitment to their jobs. Organisations should also promote awareness among leaders and seafarers about the complexities of ambivalent relationships and offer emotional intelligence training to effectively navigate these dynamics. Additionally, given the non-significant moderating effect of POS, a comprehensive support system addressing various aspects of seafarers' well-being, including mental health, work-life balance, and social support, should be established. Encouraging long-term development programs and continuous learning opportunities can enhance engagement, commitment, and overall performance. By integrating these strategies, maritime organisations can leverage the positive effects of LMX ambivalence, trust, and job embeddedness while creating a supportive work environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by seafarers working far from home. This integrated approach will lead to improved performance, increased job satisfaction, and the overall well-being of seafarers, contributing to the success of the organisation as a whole.

Our study's unexpected finding that LMX ambivalence is positively associated with performance has significant ramifications for both practice and academia. In practice, managers and leaders should recognise that ambivalent relationships with employees can potentially benefit performance. This highlights the importance of fostering an environment in which employees feel comfortable expressing mixed feelings towards their leaders. Encouraging open communication and providing constructive feedback can leverage the motivational aspects of ambivalence and boost employees' dedication and efforts. Understanding the complex interplay between emotions in work relationships can lead to effective leadership strategies and employee support systems. In

the academic world, this result challenges existing assumptions and calls for further research on the underlying mechanisms driving the positive impact of LMX ambivalence on performance. Scholars should explore how individual and contextual factors influence this relationship, delve into the boundary conditions of this phenomenon, and investigate the role of leadership behaviour in shaping the outcomes of ambivalent relationships. Moreover, it highlights the need to approach research with an open mind and encourages researchers to consider alternative perspectives and the potential positive effects that might have been overlooked owing to conventional assumptions. Overall, this finding presents a new direction for research and a valuable opportunity for organisations to optimise employee performance by better understanding and managing ambivalent relationships between leaders and team members.

The surprising outcome of the lack of significant moderation by perceived organisational support (POS) in the relationship between LMX ambivalence and performance has considerable ramifications for practical applications and the academic community. In practice, organisations in the maritime industry need to recognise that perceived organisational support may not be the sole determinant of performance outcomes for seafarers in ambivalent relationships with their leaders. Instead, they should adopt a holistic approach that considers other influential factors, such as onboard social support, leadership behaviours, and the unique challenges faced by seafarers working far from home. Implementing targeted support systems that address the complexities of LMX ambivalence and considering seafarers' specific needs can enhance their well-being and productivity. In the academic world, this finding challenge conventional assumptions and underscores the importance of studying multiple contextual variables to better understand the interplay between LMX ambivalence and performance in diverse work settings. Future research should explore additional factors that could influence this relationship and investigate the mechanisms through which these factors interact to impact performance outcomes. By advancing our understanding of these dynamics, researchers can provide valuable insights into optimising employee performance and well-being in and beyond the maritime industry.

In today VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) world, our study's surprising finding of a positive association between LMX ambivalence and performance has vital implications. It challenges conventional wisdom and encourages leaders and organisations to embrace the ambiguity present in employee relationships. Open and honest communication amid mixed feelings can spark creativity and innovation, particularly in rapidly changing environments. This result emphasises the need for adaptive leadership strategies to harness the potential benefits of ambivalence, thereby promoting resilience against uncertainty. In academia, this calls for a re-evaluation of research approaches and a deeper exploration of the underlying mechanisms in diverse contexts. By embracing complexity, researchers can gain fresh insights into human behaviour amidst VUCA challenges. Overall, the positive link between LMX ambivalence and performance in the VUCA world calls for adaptability, open-mindedness, and willingness to explore unconventional ideas in both practical applications and academic research, offering a novel perspective on leadership and organisational dynamics in an ever-evolving landscape.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the factors influencing the performance of Thai seafarers away from home. By investigating the interplay between ((LMX) ambivalence, job embeddedness, trust, and perceived organisational support (POS), we have unravelled important insights into the challenges faced by these seafarers and their work outcomes. These findings emphasise the significance of cultivating positive work relationships, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation, and building trust among leaders and crew members. Furthermore, understanding the dynamics of LMX ambivalence and its impact on performance can help maritime organisations develop targeted support systems to enhance the well-being and productivity of their seafaring workforce. As the maritime industry continues to play a crucial role in global trade and commerce, addressing these factors will not only benefit seafarers themselves but also contribute to the overall success and sustainability of the industry. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the challenges faced by workers in remote and demanding

environments, and paves the way for future investigations in related contexts. Ultimately, we hope that the findings presented here will help in designing better policies and practices to support the professional growth and welfare of Thai seafarers and their counterparts worldwide.

7. Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge some potential limitations that may influence the interpretation of the results. First, the research focused solely on Thai seafarers, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to seafarers from other cultural backgrounds or regions. Second, this study relied on self-reported data, which might be subjected to social desirability bias or memory recall errors. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study prevents the establishment of causality between the variables; a longitudinal approach might offer more robust conclusions. Finally, the study examined a specific set of factors while neglecting other potential variables that could influence seafarers' performance, such as family support and individual coping strategies. Acknowledging these limitations will encourage future researchers to address these gaps and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting seafarer performance in diverse contexts.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Ethical guidelines

This article has undergone ethical review and approval by Ramkhamhaeng University ethics committee, and it has been assigned the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reference number RU-HRE 66/0002.

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