

# Self-Created Nightmares: Impact of LMX on Perception of Politics with Mediating Role of Impostor Phenomenon and Moderating Role of Locus of Control

Nida Abbas\* and Sajid Bashir†

## Abstract

*One of the dominant theories of leadership literature is LMX theory that focuses on the dyadic ties between a manager and his followers. Traditionally LMX scholars have emphasized that individuals falling in high quality relationship experience positive work outcomes such as job satisfaction, OCB, well-being etc. The scarce studies have investigated the potential of undesirable outcomes that can emerge as a result of close ties with the manager. The extant research responds to a recent call for increased empirical evidence to explore the dark side of high quality LMX relationship. In the current research, a model has been proposed, that high quality LMX employees can experience negative outcomes when they experience a mechanism called impostor phenomenon. It is an intra-individual phenomenon faced by employees when they underestimate their abilities. The study followed the time-lagged design method, where data was gathered in three phases with a gap of one month. Approximately, 400 questionnaires were distributed out of which three hundred forms were completed and received in time from private sector of Pakistan. Convenient sampling technique was used for data collection. It was found that high quality LMX employees do not perceive their organization to be political. However, once a high quality employee experiences impostor phenomenon and feels guilty of the reward given to him, his perceptions changes. As a result, they view the element of unfairness in their workplace.*

**Keywords:** LMX, Impostor phenomenon, locus of control, perception of politics

## Introduction

Positive supervisor-subordinate relationships are deemed as fundamental concern of organizations due to the valence of desirable outcomes generated because of their presence. Leader member exchange (LMX) theory intend to both elucidate the nature and envisage the outcomes of high and low quality bonds between managers and subordinates (Anand, Hu, Liden, & Vidyarthi, 2011). LMX theory, with its pedigrees on role

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\* Nida Abbas, Phd Scholar, Capital University of Science and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan, Email: [nidaabas@gmail.com](mailto:nidaabas@gmail.com)

† Dr. Sajid Bashir, Head of Department, Management and Social Sciences, Capital University of Science and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: [profsajid@hotmail.com](mailto:profsajid@hotmail.com)

theory (Graen& Cashman, 1975) and drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) emphasize on prevalence of dyadic exchange relationship between a leader and his follower based on their daily interaction at workplace and that reciprocal relationships vary in terms of quality (Erdogan & Bauer, 2014; Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden & Ferris, 2012).The nature of relationship a leader form with each of his follower is considered unique (Olsson, 2017; Van Seters & Field 1990).

An overview of LMX literature indicates that subordinates have a translucent understanding of their LMX relationship quality with their manager, which can result to undesirable behaviors and feelings among employees (Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010). Evidence repeated show, existence of low quality relationship generate negative work outcomes such as coercive behavior, weak group cohesiveness, decreased performance, low well-being, uncertainty, weak emotional support, and low trust (Chiniara, &Bentein, 2017; Hooper & Martin, 2008; Wu, Tsui, &Kinicki, 2010; Rose & Wright, 2005; Rosen, Harris, &Kacmar, 2011).

In the same manner, high quality relationship with followers predict positive outcomes such as trust, emotional support, respect, loyalty, high performance, organizational citizenship behavior, creativity, decreased turnover, less arguments, employee engagement, extra-role performance and job satisfaction (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Wang &Wong, 2011; Martin, Epitropaki, Thomas &Topakas, 2010; Ilies, Nahrgang, &Morgeson, 2007; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997; Erdogan & Bauer, 2014;Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, &Epitropaki, 2016).

Over the years, few studies have also proposed that high quality LMX relationship does not always result in positive outcomes (Harris &Kacmar, 2006;Nelson, 2017; Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005; Zhou, &Zhang, 2017). Despite, being an important aspect of LMX, prevailing research regarding this area is limited (Cropanzano, Dasborough, &Weiss, 2017; Choi, 2013). Therefore, the present research argues that there is a possibility that certain mechanisms may undermine this unbalanced research of high quality LMX relationships. To address this paradox, the present study proposes a theoretical model to gain insight into this sphere. One explanatory phenomenon found in literature, under such condition is impostor phenomenon.

When a subordinate is compensated beyond his expectations, there is a probability that he will experience a state coupled with guilty and fear that he is not liable to a reward that has been given to him. Such condition has been termed in literature as impostor phenomenon (Clance & , 1978; McDowell, Boyd, & Bowler, 2007, Whitman, &Shanine,

2012). There is a likelihood that high quality LMX employee might develop this syndrome as LMX literature suggests that high quality LMX employees are over rewarded by their leader (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). No a single study exists that has directly assessed a relationship between impostor phenomenon and LMX in literature. Hence, present study intends to empirically analyze this gap.

The recent literature imply that LMX has a direct relationship with perception of politics (Davis, & Gardner, 2004; Harris, & Kacmar, 2005) because high quality LMX employees are close to their leader (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). They understand their leader better and are less likely to perceive an element of politics in organization (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992). However, in the current model it has been proposed that high quality LMX employee can also perceive politics in their organization when they experience impostor phenomenon. Although, perception of politics is less likely to result in negative outcomes. However, high quality LMX employee when experiences impostor syndrome and fails to internalize his success, is likely to sense an element of politics in organization. This relationship is understudied in literature. Similarly, the feeling of impostor phenomenon has also been associated with external locus of control (Sightler & Wilson, 2001). The present framework also examines the moderating role on locus of control between LMX and impostor phenomenon. It has been proposed that presence of external locus of control will strengthen this relationship and internal locus of control will weaken this relationship. No prior study has been found that has analyzed the role of locus of control between LMX and impostor phenomenon. This is the third gap that this study intends to fill.

The present study aims to contribute in existing literature in several ways. Firstly, management scholars have emphasized the need to investigate the negative outcomes of high quality relationships (Nelson, 2017; Zhou, & Zhang, 2017; Harris & Kacmar 2006; Yoshinori, Crum, Ruben, & Pautsch, 2005; Kacmar, & Witt, 2005). The present study endeavors to reconcile this gap by proposing a research model that will provide new insight into dark side of high quality relationships. Secondly, research regarding impostor phenomenon in the field of organizational behavior is at infancy stage (Neureiter, & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). Despite constant calls by scholars to empirically analyze this phenomenon at workplace it still remains an unexplored domain (McDowell, Boyd, & Bowler, 2007; Parkman, 2016). Building on this stance, present study intends to integrate the LMX with impostor phenomenon to augment extant literature. Similarly, little theoretical and empirical research exists regarding the connection between LMX and

perception of politics (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). By answering these calls from recent literature the present study proposes and evaluates a model to gain insight into the proposed framework.

### **Literature Review**

#### *LMX and Perception of Politics*

With the emerging competitive business world, many organizations are facing the problem of politics (Rosen, Ferris, Brown, Chen, & Yan, 2014). The construct of organization politics is generally associated with perception of inequity within the organization (Hsiung, Lin, & Lin, 2012). In literature perception of politics is defined as individual's assessment regarding the degree of influence, power, behavior, self-interest motives taken by others employees to attain benefit (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2003). An employee may perceive the working environment, political when he notices that some of his coworkers are favored, by his manager while others are not (Kacmar, Andrews, Harris, & Tepper, 2013). Similarly, as noted by Byrne (2005), perception of politics reduces the overall organizational effectiveness.

Perception of politics depends on individual's assessment regarding the degree of influence, power, behavior, self-interest motives taken by others employees to attain benefit (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2003). It is found to be associated with deficit levels of OCB, job performance, and job satisfaction (Harris & Kacmar, 2005; Vigoda, 2000). Moreover, research indicates that perception of politics in organizations results in lower levels of trust (Othman, 2008). Similarly trust is a vital element of leader-member exchange relationship (Seppälä, Lipponen, & Pirttilä-Backman, 2012). As leader-member exchange theory revolves around the exchange process that takes place between a leader and his subordinate based on trust along with respect (Hsiung and Tsai, 2009). Similarly, high quality LMX employees perceive their leader to be fair as they are appreciated for their work (Tierney, 2008). Moreover, in literature there exists an established negative nexus between LMX and perception of politics (Davis, & Gardner, 2004; Harris, & Kacmar, 2005). Thus the following hypothesis can be developed:

*H1: LMX has a negative relationship with perception of politics*

#### *LMX Leading To Perception of Politics through Imposter Phenomenon*

In leadership literature, leader-member exchange is one of the widely researched theory (Schyns & Day, 2010) that insinuates the basic principle of differential treatment by manager, such that classifying the subordinates from low to high quality relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). High quality employee have been associated with wider range of

positive work outcomes such as OCB, job satisfaction, job performance, trust (Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee & Epitropaki, 2016; Skakon, Nielsen, Borg, & Guzman, 2010; Li, Sanders, & Frenkel, 2012; Chen, Wang, Chang, & Hu, 2008).

It is important to note, that employees are well-informed of their LMX classification that can result in adverse attitudinal and behavioral outcomes among subordinates (Vidyarthi, Liden, Anand, Erdogan, & Ghosh, 2010). Although, handful of studies have also proposed that high quality LMX relationship does not always result in positive outcomes (Harris, Kacmar, & Witt, 2005). In general, LMX scholars have mostly overlooked the undesirable work outcomes associated with high quality LMX (Bolino & Turnley, 2009; Cropanzano, Dasborough, & Weiss, 2017), and concentrated more on negative consequences linked with low quality LMX (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

At times, a leader may over reward his employee with whom he has high quality relationship (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006). When a high quality LMX employee is over rewarded, he may feel uncertain about it and associate his success to some factors other than his capabilities and intelligence (Bernard, Dollinger, & Ramaniah, 2002). Similarly, when an employee is rewarded beyond his expectations, he is likely to develop impostor phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978).

The noteworthy inconsistency that arises between an individual achievement and his self-view is called impostor phenomenon (Bernard et al., 2002). It has been defined as “an internal experience of intellectual phoniness, despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, individual who experience the impostor phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise” (Clance & Imes, 1978). Initially, conceptualized as specifically female experience (Clance & Imes, 1978), was later found to be prevalent in both genders (Rohrman et al., 2016).

The present study proposes that high quality LMX employees can also perceive politics in their organization when they experience impostor phenomenon. Employees' reaction to a situation is based on their perception and that can be contradictory to real condition (Bodla & Danish, 2009). High quality LMX employees when experience impostor syndrome and fail to internalize their success, finds an external factor to strengthen their current stance and that factor can be politics in organization. As employees perceiving their environment political feel themselves as being controlled by their managers (Byron, Khazanchi, & Nazarian, 2010). Therefore, after reviewing the literature following hypothesis can be devised:

*H2: LMX has a positive relationship with impostor phenomenon.*

*H3: Impostor phenomenon mediates the relationship between LMX and perception of politics*

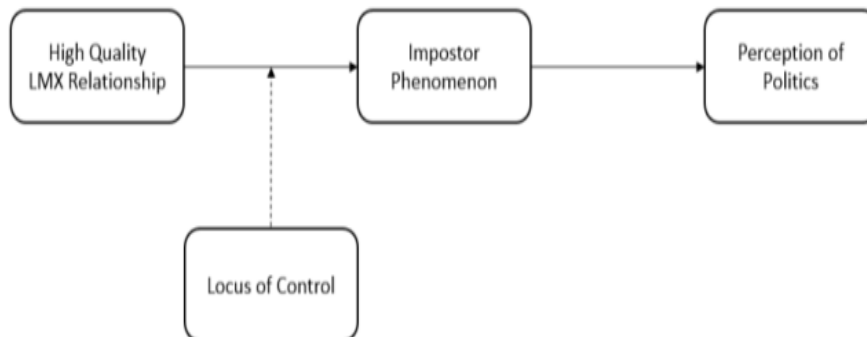
*Moderating Role of Locus of Control*

Another aspect of supervisor-subordinate relationship is the extent to which the follower believes he has control over the environment. This phenomenon of control is termed in literature as locus of control (Rotter, 1966). It has been used as a moderator in numerous studies (Engqvist Jonsson, & Nilsson, 2014; Malik, Butt, & Choi, 2015; Agarwal & Agarwal, 2016). Individuals who believe they are in control of the event that take place in their lives are referred as employee with internal locus of control. On the other hand, employees who tend to believe they cannot control the events that are happening in their lives and they attribute their success or failure to external forces are known as external locus of control employees (Spector, 1982).

Similarly, in the present framework it has been proposed that high quality LMX employees develop impostor phenomenon. When an individual experiences this phenomenon he tends to associate his success to external factors such as luck (Hoang, 2013). In the same manner, employees high on external locus of control tend to strengthen this relationship as they are of the viewpoint that external forces exercise an impact on their circumstances (Spector, 1982). Hence, following hypothesis has been formed:

*H4: Locus of control moderates the relationship between LMX and impostor phenomenon such that external locus of control will strengthen this relationship.*

Figure 1 shows a theoretical framework of the present study.



## **Methodology**

### *Population and Sample*

The data for extant research was gathered in three stages with a gap of one month as study followed time-lag design. The unit of analysis for this study was individuals working in private sector of Pakistan. In the first phase, participants received a letter containing a little inform about the study and ensuring their confidentiality in a non-contrived environment. Those participants who agreed to be the part of this study were requested to fill the stage 1 questionnaire that consisted of information regarding LMX. Similarly, in this phase, participants provided their contact details as well.

After a gap of a month participants were contacted again, for stage two where data regarding locus of control and impostor phenomenon was collected. While in the last phase participants were contacted for the last time to gather the information regarding perception of politics. Over a period of eight months approximately four hundred questionnaires were distributed, out of which three hundred questionnaires were correctly filled and received in time. Response rate was 75 percent, whereas convenient sampling technique was used to collect the data. The sample consisted of 42 percent female and 58 percent male participants. 37 percent of respondents had bachelor's degree, 42 percent had a Master's degree, and 17 percent had less than a Bachelor's degree. 57.5 percent of respondents were in the age bracket of 26 and 35 years

### *Measures*

The questionnaire was in English language where each item was measured using five point Likert scale. Participants completed the questionnaires in three stages which consisted of five sections in total. First section included the demographic information such as age, gender, and education.

### *Leader-Member Exchange*

In order to measure LMX, a 7 item scale developed by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) was adopted. The scale measured responses on 5 point Likert scale. Example of items include the following: "Do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?", "How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?", and "How well does your leader recognize your potential?" Reliability score for this scale in this study was 0.75.

*Impostor Phenomenon*

In order to measure impostor of concerned employees' 20-item scale developed by Clance, (1986) was adopted. Example of items include the following: "I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task.", "I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am.", "I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me". Reliability score for this scale in this study was 0.78

*Perception of politics*

Perception of politics will be measured with 15-item scale developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). Some of the items are as follow: "There are a lot of uncertainties in this organization", "People in this organization attempt to build them by tearing others down". Reliability score for this scale in this study was 0.83

*Locus of control*

In order to measure locus of control sixteen item scale developed by Spector (1988) was adopted. Some of the items are as follow: "Getting the job you want is mostly a matter of luck", "Promotions are given to employees who perform well on the job", "It takes a lot of luck to be an outstanding employee on most jobs". Reliability score for this scale in this study was 0.87

**Results**

Table 1 depicts the mean, standard deviation and inter-correlation of the variables under study. LMX was significantly and negatively related to perception of politics, indicating that high quality LMX employees tend to perceive their leader as well as organizational environment to be fair. Impostor phenomenon was found to have a significant association with LMX, such that it was positively related to LMX. The mean score of impostor phenomenon was above the average score indicating that participants who had close ties with their leader tend to experience impostor phenomenon.

**Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlation**

		Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Gender	1.58	.49	1						
2	Age	2.11	.76	0.09	1					
3	Education	2.42	.81	-0.06	.48**	1				
4	LMX	3.28	0.80	0.05	0.01	-.47**	1			
5	IP	3.28	0.52	-0.05	-0.07	-0.09	.16**	1		
6	POP	2.15	0.80	-0.12	-0.09	0.07	-.15**	0.11	1	
7	LOC	1.30	0.56	-0.08	-0.10	-0.03	0.03	-0.02	-0.06	1

SD - Standard Deviation. p<.05 and p<.01.

**Table 2. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses**

	Impostor Phenomenon			Perception of politics		
	$\beta$	R2	$\Delta R2$	$\beta$	R2	$\Delta R2$
Predictors						
Step 1						
Control Variables		.013			.033	
Step 2						
LMX	.117**	.035	.023**	-.148*	.044	.022*
Mediation						
Step 1						
Control Variables					.035	
Step 2						
Impostor phenomenon				.162*	.060	.011*
Step 3						
LMX				-.145*	.060	.014*

Table 2 shows the findings of hierarchical regression analyses that were conducted to analyze the proposed hypotheses. In the initial step of regression analysis, the demographic variables such as gender, age and education were controlled. The findings supported hypothesis 1, i.e. high quality LMX employees perceive less politics in their organization. Therefore, respondents who indicated high quality relationship with their manager also believed that their leader was fair.

Table 2 also indicates LMX has a significant and positive relationship with impostor phenomenon, it can be comprehended that high quality LMX employees who are being rewarded by their leader tend to develop a feeling of guilt manifested as impostor phenomenon. Additionally, impostor phenomenon was found to be significantly and positively associated with perception of politics, indicating employees who experience like an impostor, perceive there was politics within the organization. Hence, hypothesis three was also accepted. The findings of the present research suggest that impostor phenomenon partially mediates the relationship between LMX and perception of politic.

Table 3 depicts the results of a step-wise regression analysis that was carried out to test the proposed moderation hypothesis

**Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis**

Predictors	Impostor phenomenon		
	$\beta$	R2	$\Delta R2$
Step 1			
Control Variables		.013	
Step 2			
LMX	.310**		
LOC	.430*	.037	.024*
Step 3			
LMX*LOC	.153*	.057	.020*

In the first step demographic variables were controlled. In the second step LMX and locus of control were entered and an interaction term between LMX and locus of control was inserted in the third step. The interaction term was found to be significant; indicating that locus of control enhances the positive relationship between LMX impostor phenomena. Figure 2 shows the moderation slop, where LMX was treated as an independent variable, locus of control as moderator and impostor phenomenon as dependent variable. The graph depicts that high quality LMX employees are likely to experience impostor phenomenon if they demonstrate external locus of control. Hence hypothesis four has been accepted.

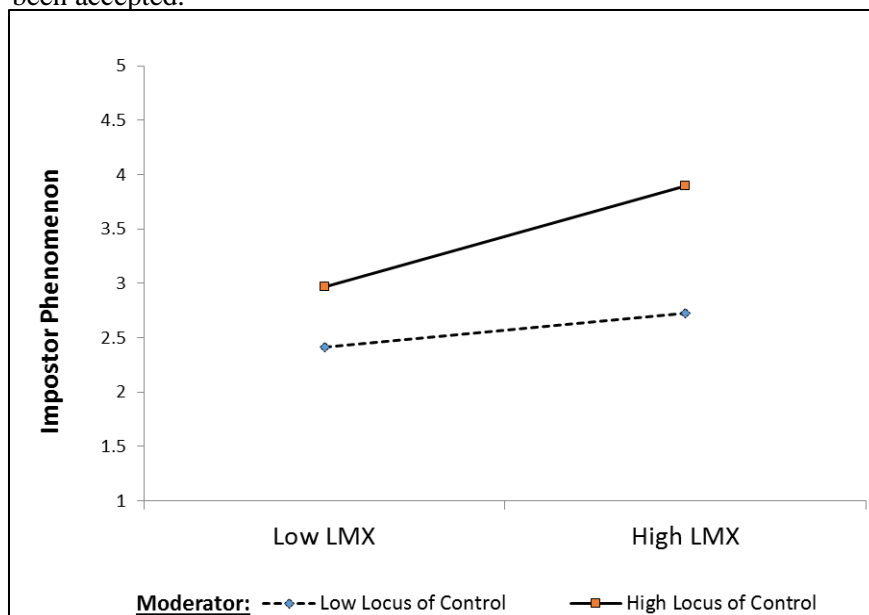


Figure 2. Moderation Plot of locus of control between LMX and impostor phenomenon

### Discussion

Results of the existing study provide an insight into the association of high quality LMX, impostor phenomenon, perception of politics and locus of control in Pakistan. Consistent with the previous findings, the present study establishes that LMX high quality relationship employees are less likely to perceive their leader to be political (Ferris & Kacmar 1992; Davis, & Gardner, 2004). Conversely, high quality relationship employees experiencing impostor phenomenon perceive that there was some degree of politics involve in their organization. The results also unfolded the role of locus of control between LMX and impostor

phenomenon. Employees demonstrating external locus of control tend to blame their success to external factors (Rotter, 1966).

Large number of respondents having high quality LMX relations with their leader in this study reported experiencing impostor phenomenon at some point. While they were unable to internalize their success coupled with the feeling of guilt, they blamed their success to external factors such as leader for being biased (Gediman, 1985). Based on this fact the employees' perceive that there is some degree of unfairness present in their organization. Hence, employee who is more sensitive to impartiality, experiences an internal conflict such as impostor phenomenon due to his own perception that he is being favored by his manager. Consequently, he tries to understand the circumstances and perceive that there is some element of unfairness involved in the organization. Due to this politics he has been awarded a status or reward that he is not capable of. Research also reveals that at least seventy percent of individuals may experience this phenomenon, once in a life (Gravois, 2007).

These findings can be explained with the help of a study conducted by in public sector of Pakistan, that revealed the presence of organizational cronyism in public sector (Shaheen, Bashir, & Khan, 2017), this can be a reason of high quality LMX employee might be promoted on the basis of close ties with his manager. Once promoted he might start feeling guilty of the status. Kets de Vries (2005) who suggested that impostor can emerge as a result of dysfunctional family. When an individual with socially disadvantaged background is rewarded beyond his expectations, he is unable to internalize his success fearing that his family or close friends will find out that he is not capable or worthy enough of the reward.

Moderation analysis shows that locus of control moderates the relationship between LMX and impostor phenomenon such that employees with external locus of control are more likely to experience the positive effects of LMX on impostor phenomenon. These findings support the previous studies (Hoang, 2015), where individuals suffering from impostor phenomena associate their success to external factors. Similarly, these individuals with external locus of control are more likely to strengthen the present relationship between LMX and impostor phenomenon. Employees with external locus of control believe there are external forces present in their surroundings that control their behavior (Spector, 1982).

### **Conclusion**

The current study contributed to the comprehension of dark side of high quality LMX by, for the first time in literature, examining deep into the mechanism of impostor phenomenon that can probe negative outcome of perception of politics. The role of locus of control was also analyzed in relation to the current model. The emerging picture established that high quality employee can face negative outcome when they feel guilty as a result of impostor phenomenon. This relationship tends to be stronger for employee with external locus of control. Delving deep into the present framework revealed that impostor phenomenon can result in perception of politics. These constant internal conflicts can affect an individuals' mental and physical health that can ultimately affect the whole organization (Whitman, &Shanine, 2012). Hence, organizations should devise certain coping strategies for syndrome like impostor. Individuals who face impostor phenomenon also face certain other negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety, guilt, etc. Therefore, employees should be provided with certain training/counseling sessions that help them in coping with such feelings.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The findings of study suggest few avenues for forthcoming studies based on its limitations. Firstly, an obvious limitation of extant study was the exclusion of middle quality relationship as recent literature states a manager also forms middle quality relationships with some of his subordinates (Nelson, 2017). Hence, future studies can investigate the stance of middle quality relationship employee in current framework. Secondly, only one outcome of impostor phenomenon has been studied, forthcoming studies may delve deeper into the work outcomes of impostor phenomenon such as trust in leader, satisfaction with leader etc. Thirdly, the same research model can be imitated in other cultures to improve the generalizability.

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