




## Article

# Relationship beyond the Workplace: Impact of Guanxi GRX Scale on Employee Engagement and Performance

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**Abstract:** The primary objective of this research was to find out the impact of GRX scale (ganqing, renqing, and xinren) on a non-Chinese working environment. Thus, to apply and ascertain the effect of the three dimensions of guanxi on employees' engagement and, eventually, their job performance in an African working environment. This research used social exchange theory to explain the relationship between supervisors and their subordinates. The research data comprises 530 respondents who were randomly chosen from seven organizations. Smart-PLS 3.2.8 was the primary instrument used to analyze the data. The finding indicated that renqing, synonymous with mutual sharing or need for reciprocity, was highly significant with employee engagement and job performance. Hence, a win-win outcome is achieved whenever employers exhibit genuine concern and care for their employees. Additionally, there was a negative relationship between ganqing (emotional attachment) and employee engagement. This revealed that making decisions based on personal relationships will negatively affect employees' engagement and job performance. This research adds to the literature by revealing that guanxi is applicable in non-Chinese workplaces.

**Keywords:** ganqing; renqing; xinren; employee engagement; job performance; social exchange theory



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## 1. Introduction

No organization can exist in the absence of necessary and appropriate relationships. Indeed, as Confucius indicated, humans are relational beings, and our lives are interconnected by our relationships [1]. According to [2], the interaction between leaders and employees is regarded as the most critical relationship for employees. Thus, the leader's ability to form an efficient relationship with employees or create an environment that induces expedient relationships will significantly impact the level of their engagement and performance. It is unsurprising that the supervisor-subordinate (SSG) relationship has garnered considerable attention in recent times [3].

Given the important role that leaders play in fostering employee engagement and performance, the following question is likely to arise: Why are some leaders better at engaging employees than others? Researchers such as [4,5] have conducted a number of studies in the field of personality and engagement that essentially provide an answer to this topic. According to other researchers [6,7], a leader's ability to effectively handle the diverse relationships of an organization may be a contributing factor. Indeed, connecting the two (personality and ability to manage relationships) demonstrates how critical relationships are to the success of any organization. One of the best concepts for gaining a better understanding of workplace relationships is guanxi.

Similar to leader-member exchange (LMX), which explains the relationship between leaders and their subordinates from a western context, the concept of guanxi originates from China, and it is a more advanced version of LMX. Guanxi is exceptional in its attempt to keep amicable relationships even beyond the work premises [8]. Guanxi is associated with Confucianism because it argues that humans are relational beings who cannot be divorced from his or her relationships [8,9].

One of the main differences between LMX and guanxi is the limit of the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. In their research [8,10], they pointed out that LMX relationships are mostly limited to the workplace, but with guanxi, it exceeds the working environment—it even cuts across the family and friends of the parties involved [8,9]. Additionally, as indicated by [9,10], LMX is mainly relationship-biased (for the benefit of the organization), while guanxi is mostly relationship-oriented (seeks to benefit the individual beyond the organization).

Researchers [7,11] have paid considerable attention to work engagement, especially workplace relationships. Other researchers have highlighted that high levels of employee engagement can readily provide an organization with a competitive edge, particularly because such workers are positively engaged in their job [12,13]. Employee engagement is essential because it encourages and creates a ‘go the extra mile’ mindset [14]. This can help raise employee morale and urge them to be more responsive and proactive in their service delivery.

As revealed by [15], engaged employees ensure that they meet their job’s requirements and expectations. They exhibit these three key attributes: vigor, dedication, and absorption in the workplace [16]. The performance of employees is revealed when they are committed to their work and discharge their expected roles in line with the overall objective [17].

Though there is a lack of substantial research on guanxi and employee engagement, particularly on the working environment of non-Chinese, this research examines the three main dimensions of guanxi (GRX scale) in connection to employee engagement and job performance.

Regarding the influence of the GRX scale (ganqing, renqing, and xinren) and their impact on employee engagement and job performance, as far as the researchers are aware, this research is useful for ascertaining such relationships, especially among non-Chinese personnel. The focus of early researchers was on Chinese indigenes [1,18,19]. Others [20,21] also concentrated on the impact of guanxi as a whole but not necessarily the GRX scale.

One of the most dominant theories used in comprehending behavior at the workplace is Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to [22], the quality of exchange is dependent on the interaction between the supervisor and the subordinate. The positive interactions with management result in feelings of gratitude [22], create a sense of obligations [23], generate formidable goodwill [24], prompt the need to be helpful [25], and build trust among the parties involved [22].

According to [26], the supervisors’ rapport with their subordinates and how employees are managed will influence their engagement level. When employees are engaged, it will increase their commitment level and, eventually, the organization’s overall performance [15]. Since guanxi seeks to build a formidable rapport between supervisors and their subordinates, this research seeks to find out the impact of the three dimensions of guanxi on employee engagement and job performance in an African working environment.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 focuses on the literature review and hypotheses development. Section 3 discusses the research’s methodology. Section 4 entails the data analysis. Sections 5 and 6 address the discussion and implications of the study as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research. Section 7 presents the conclusion of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Dimensions of Guanxi

There does not appear to be a single English word that adequately describes the term “guanxi”, but as explained by [19], guanxi refers to the connection or bond between familiar people within a group. [27] considers guanxi from three distinct perspectives:

First, guanxi refers to individuals who are connected to one another due to a shared personality or a shared status within a particular group. Second, it refers to the actual connections and constant communication that frequently occur between individuals. Finally, it provides an explanation for the indirect relationships that occur between others.

Guanxi is defined by [28] as the ties between two or more parties. Other researchers in [8] define guanxi as the pure and solid relationship between individuals that serves as a means to receive social, commercial, personal, or family benefits, as well as cooperatively working towards attaining an organization’s goals.

According to [29], guanxi is a three-dimensional construct comprised of ganqing, renqing, and xinren. It is referred to as the (GRX) scale of guanxi [29]. These main dimensions of guanxi primarily provide a comprehensive explanation of the concept.

### 2.2. Ganqing, Employee Engagement, and Job Performance

Ganqing’s primary function is to ascertain the degree of emotional attachment and empathy that exist between the parties involved [21]. Ganqing, therefore, elucidates the emotional aspect of guanxi. It expresses how people are emotionally connected, the positive mutual feelings that exist between them, and serves as a solid foundation for all sorts of social interaction. Ganqing makes it simple for people to collaborate and can serve as a glue that holds them together [1].

Ganqing occurs in the business arena when the individuals involved are viewed as business counterparts but also as friends. When individuals are treated like friends, they harness their different social interactions to benefit their professional connections. Thus, according to [8], such relationships act as a lubricant that reduces all forms of stress and friction, especially during times of conflict. Indeed, emotionally engaged individuals find any possible means to sustain their relationship [30].

There are various levels of ganqing, which indicate the degree of emotional connection between individuals. They are referred to as ‘Ganqing hao and Ganqing shen’ [29]. ‘Ganqing hao’ translates as ‘good ganqing’ (emotional attachment). It varies according to the setting. In the family setting, it demonstrates a strong family connection. In the friend setting, it demonstrates equality and strong friendship [31]. ‘Ganqing shen’ translates as ‘deep ganqing,’ this type of emotional attachment is frequently defined as a long-standing social relationship [21].

Ganqing, in its simplest form, refers to the level to which emotional connection, feeling, and understanding are mutually shared [31]. It is a critical indicator of guanxi; thus, it is inextricably linked to guanxi. Nonetheless, despite its critical significance, [32] mentioned that it is not limited to providing an autonomous understanding of guanxi; it will undoubtedly require all traits such as the exchange of favors and the requirement of trust.

When employees have a stronger ganqing and are actively involved at work, they become more focused, which helps them perform better on their assigned tasks [33]. Other researchers have demonstrated that work engagement is significantly associated with productivity and job performance, in part because engaged individuals are more connected to their work, more energetic and devoted, as well as willing to go the extra mile with their work [34,35].

Additionally, guanxi’s emotional connection and attachment make subordinates ‘feel more at ease’ at the workplace [25]. As a result, they readily follow their supervisor’s supervision and leadership—not out of obligation but out of affection. Emotions are believed to significantly influence the way people behave. When an individual is emotionally involved in anything, they tend to put aside other concerns so that they can devote all of

their attention to the object to which they are emotionally attached. As the social exchange theory explains, amid mutual feelings and connection, individuals will likely give out their possible best in the workplace [25].

In terms of employee engagement, we conclude that ‘ganqing,’ as the emotional dimension of guanxi, will result in employees being fully immersed in their work, and thus:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Ganqing will positively impact job performance.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Employee engagement will mediate the relationship between ganqing and job performance.*

### 2.3. Renqing, Employee Engagement, and Job Performance

In English, renqing is synonymous with “owing a favor” or “reciprocating a favor.” Renqing occurs when special treatment, sharing of gifts, and other forms of transactions are exchanged to strengthen the connection between parties [36]. It frequently takes effect in one of two ways: either as a transaction or as an offer [25]. Renqing is fundamental for securing and deepening any social relationships. It acts as a link between many parties and is predicated on the key premise of mutual sharing to sustain the given relationship. Indeed, renqing is necessary for the Chinese setting, and its exchange strengthens the social connection between those involved [1].

There are diverse ways of showing renqing. Some may demand considerable effort, while others do not. However, the act of reciprocating a favor is extremely valuable. It could be as simple as lending a hand or going the extra mile in order to show favor [29]. It also includes presenting a gift as a mark of appreciation or strengthening a social bond, among other things. In the context of any given business transaction, renqing ensures that the parties involved have a balanced exchange of favor. This is because when an exchange becomes one-sided, it ceases to reflect renqing’s actual essence. However, it should be emphasized that the time period for returning a favor is not stringent. The recipient may wait until there is a high demand for the needed favor (especially during times of greatest need for the benefactor) [36]. Renqing has a number of beneficial impacts, including the strengthening of personal bonds [1], the development of mutual trust [8], and the formation of a commitment bond among the parties involved [37].

The practice of renqing fosters social reciprocity and empathy, which are manifested in the form of favors exchanged between individuals [18]. With this exchange, the people involved hope to form a bond that will keep them together in the future. As a result, repaying a favor is vital because renqing would be rendered obsolete without it.

The attitude and behavior of employees toward their work will be enhanced if supervisors believe in them and are knowledgeable in promoting guanxi in the workplace. Additionally, supervisors who are dedicated to their work will spur their subordinates to give their best. One common reason is that when subordinates perceive that their immediate supervisor exemplifies the type of behavior they expect and values them as such (treats them favorably), they feel respected and are more likely to give their all to their jobs [38].

As the theory of social exchange argues, employees are often inspired to reciprocate the leader’s behavior by replicating it and developing a greater level of trust in the leader. When a supervisor exhibits an openness to their subordinates’ needs, it encourages them to be more cooperative and involved at work in order to strengthen their guanxi with their supervisors and also increase their sense of belonging to the organization [33]. As a result of this improved sense of belonging, employees will perform at their very best in discharging their respective responsibilities at the workplace as well as be prepared to serve the organization’s best interests as and when the need arises. They will do so to express their gratitude for the preferential treatment they received from the established guanxi. Hence, it is proposed that:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Renqing will positively impact job performance.*

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *Employee engagement will mediate the relationship between renqing and job performance.*

#### 2.4. Xinren, Employee Engagement, and Job Performance

According to [1], the term xinren can refer to giving credit to someone or relying on someone. The closest English word that can describe xinren is trust. As per [36], the term applies to an individual's interpersonal trust in his or her dignity to keep promises. As such, it is determined based on an individual's credibility and/or goodwill. Ref. [31] identified a perceptible distinction between Chinese xinren and Western trust. According to the researchers, xinren is not synonymous with the Western world; as the Western world places a higher premium on rapport (in terms of the trust) between two or more companies, the focus of the Chinese is mainly established on the interpersonal level.

Not only does xinren play a significant part in Chinese corporate culture, but it is also woven into the fabric of Chinese culture. Ref. [27] argues that the significance of xinren in Chinese culture can be gauged by the extent to which parties keep both verbal and written promises. Xinren is founded on the individuals' reputation and their history of interactions with others in any given society.

Mutual interests between the people involved are vital to the sustenance of xinren. Parties or individuals seeking to build xinren in their business relationships should strive to be nice and benevolent to one another, putting others' interests ahead of their own [36]. According to [32], the success and sustainability of the majority of business transactions and commercial relationships are contingent upon acquiring and retaining the trust of others. This is essential because it enables more efficient and effective transactions as well as eliminates any possible threat or inconsistency [39].

Job performance refers to an individual's ability to execute the specified job requirements as listed in their job description [40]. Xinren functions as a booster in this context by primarily establishing a formidable relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate, which in turn keeps them focused on executing their obligations. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 5 (H5).** *Xinren will positively impact job performance.*

**Hypothesis 6 (H6).** *Employee engagement will mediate the relationship between Xinren and job performance.*

#### 2.5. Employee Engagement and Job Performance

A limited number of studies have concluded that employees with positive feelings of vitality are creative regarding their work. Even though having such feelings is essential to work engagement, it does not cover the totality of work engagement, particularly because, according to [41], an engaged employee needs to invest their 'complete self' in their work.

Along with incorporating an employee's vitality and commitment, engagement also refers to how persistent and intense people devote their best energy to their work [15]. Thus, the employee must cognitively, physically, and persistently contribute their ideas, solutions, and strengths to their organization's betterment. Additionally, an engaged employee must exert mental energy and have a reasonable amount of curiosity in order to be productive and creative. Employees that are engaged search for resourceful knowledge, use creative techniques and apply necessary abilities when confronted with issues [42]. Furthermore, they have the fortitude to take measured risks that will benefit their organization's production.

Lastly, though financial incentive is highly imperative, the motivation of an engaged employee is far beyond such incentive [8]. Not only that, such employees have a significant



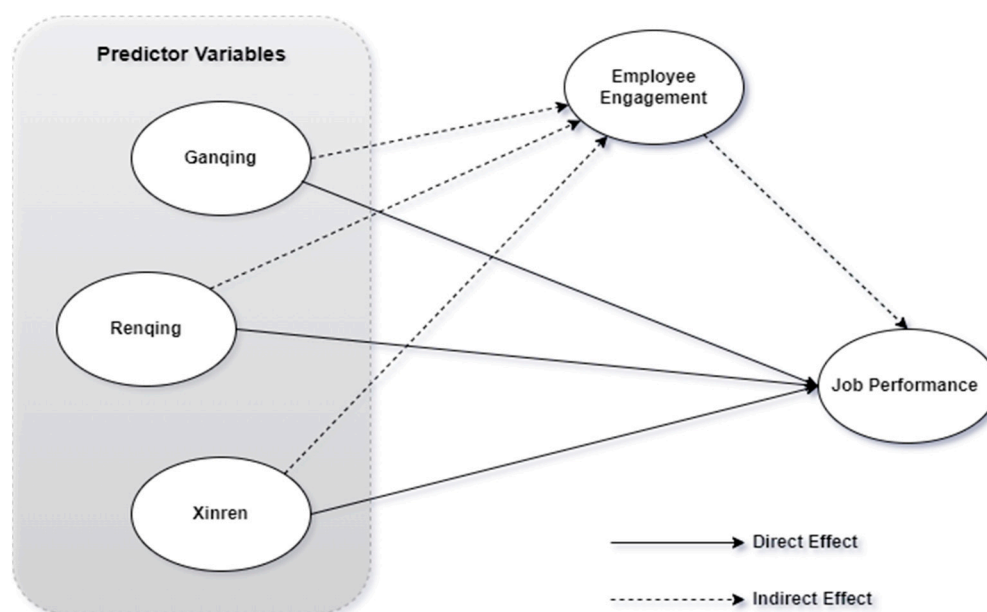
impact on other workers. Additionally, engaged employees do not perceive their work to be unduly demanding and stressful; instead, they are more enthusiastic and have a high level of affection for their work [34].

From the gathered literature, it is therefore hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 7 (H7).** *Employee engagement will have a positive effect on job performance.*

## 2.6. Research Model

Below (Figure 1) is the conceptual framework indicating the various relationships between the respective variables used in conducting this research.



**Figure 1.** Research Model.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Approach

This study used self-administered questionnaires, which facilitate the collection of information, particularly when data are collected in a large geographical area [43]. Questionnaires allow the comparison of participants' responses while maintaining their anonymity [44]. A formal questionnaire was used to collect data for the analysis. According to [45], in corporate management and research, questionnaires are the most used form of survey strategy. A questionnaire is described as a data collection strategy in which each participant is asked to answer the same number of questions in the same order [43].

### 3.2. Data Source and Collection

With the assistance of Google Forms, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed electronically and anonymously. The respondents' rights were protected, and their consent was asked beforehand. The study was conducted entirely voluntarily. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with specified statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The data were collected using a non-probability sampling technique, more precisely, convenience sampling. In all, a total of 530 questionnaires were gathered. This entails four [4] private sector organizations and three [3] public sector organizations in Ghana.

### 3.3. Variable Measurements

In order to measure the guanxi between supervisors and subordinates, the researchers adopted the GRX scale as designed by [29]. Three items each were used to measure the GRX scale (ganqing, renqing, and xinren). To find out the extent of engagement of employees, the researchers employed the attributes of employee engagement as developed by [46]. Five items were used to facilitate the measurement. In measuring employees' job performance, the questions were adopted from the validated and approved questions of [47]. The researchers used four items to measure employees' performance.

A measurement's reliability is proportional to the degree to which a description is consistent. This reliability is achieved when the Cronbach alpha value equals or is greater than 0.7 [48]. The Cronbach alpha for ganqing was (0.840), renqing (0.760), and xinren (0.827). In addition, employee engagement and job performance had a Cronbach alpha of 0.786 and 0.798, respectively. This means that the measurements' reliability is up to standard.

## 4. Data Analysis

This section consists of the descriptive statistics of demographic variables, which were analyzed using SPSS 26. SPSS 26 was utilized to assess the demographic variables using descriptive statistics, and Smart-PLS 3.2.8, as a variance-based PLS-SEM approach, was the primary analysis tool employed. This is because PLS-SEM can simultaneously evaluate all latent constructs' causal and predictive relevance while accounting for structural model measurement errors [48,49]. Additionally, since our study is explanatory in nature, PLS-SEM is the optimal method for this study. In accordance with the recommendations of [50], the measurement models were evaluated separately from the structural model. Table 1 reveals the descriptive statistics of the demographic variables.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of the Demographic Variables.

Items	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Under 30 years	227	42.8
	31–40 years	162	30.6
	41–50 years	71	13.4
	Over 50 years	70	13.2
Gender	Male	272	51.3
	Female	258	48.7
Sector of Organization	Private Sector	329	62.9
	Public Sector	201	37.1
	Diploma	72	13.6
Educational Level	Degree	255	48.1
	Masters	152	28.7
	PhD	51	9.6

This research consisted of 530 respondents. Out of the total respondents, 227 (42.8%) were aged under 30 years (mostly those who only had a bachelor's degree), while 162 (30.6%) were respondents between 31 and 40 years of age. In total, 71 (13.4%) were between 41 and 50 years of age, whereas 70 (4.8%) were over 50 years. In terms of the organizational sector, those in the public sector (62.9 %) outnumbered those in the private sector (37.1%). There were 272 males (51.3 %) and 258 females (48.7 %). The majority of respondents (255) held a bachelor's degree, followed by 152 (28.7 %) who held a master's degree. The remaining 72 (13.6%) and 51 (9.6%) had earned a diploma or a doctorate, respectively.

Table 2 explains the path coefficients of the constructs. Cronbach's alpha is a convenient test for determining a composite score's reliability or internal consistency. The general rule is that a Cronbach alpha of 0.70 and above is good, 0.80 and above is better, but measurements over 0.95 could also very well indicate the redundancy of the constructs used [49]. It is recommended that the composite reliability of a construct is at least 0.70. High composite reliability indicates that all your items constantly measure the same construct. The results above show that all the composite reliability for the constructs ranges from 0.760 to 0.840, which exceeds 0.70. For the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), they

were all above 0.5. Overall, the measurement model was concluded as appropriate for the analysis [50].

**Table 2.** Path coefficients of the structural model Robustness of the study constructs.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Engagement	0.786	0.858	0.561
Ganqing	0.840	0.904	0.759
Job Performance	0.798	0.869	0.624
Renqing	0.760	0.862	0.677
Xinren	0.827	0.896	0.742

Table 3 presents the assessment of the effect size of interactions ( $f^2$ ) between variables. The effect size ( $f^2$ ) refers to the impact of an exogenous construct on the  $R^2$  value of an endogenous latent variable. According to [51], the effect size ranges between 0.02 and 0.15 (small effect), between 0.15 and 0.30 (moderate effect), and an effect size above 0.30 is considered to be large. Table 3 shows a small effect size of (0.101, 0.148, and 0.025). When the  $Q^2$  is greater than 0, it suggests that the model has predictive relevance for a certain endogenous construct. On the contrary,  $Q^2$  values of 0 or below indicate a lack of predictive relevance [48]. Hence,  $Q^2$  values of 0.261 and 0.100 indicate that the model has predictive relevance.

**Table 3.** Predictive power and relevance of constructs ( $f^2$  and  $Q^2$ ).

	$f^2$	$Q^2$
Ganqing -> Job Performance	0.101	
Renqing -> Employee Engagement	0.148	
Xinren -> Job Performance	0.025	
Employee Engagement		0.100
Job Performance		0.261

The results of hypothesized connections between constructs are shown in Table 4. The path coefficients are standardized between  $-1$  and  $+1$ . The closer the estimated path is geared towards 1, the stronger the forecast relationship. The closer the estimated coefficients are to 0, on the other hand, the weaker the relations. With the exemption of the relationship between guanxi and employee engagement, which revealed a negative coefficient, the observation of all other coefficients showed a positive relationship between the entire constructs, although the effect varied. Additionally, this research revealed that ganqing could not significantly impact employees' performance.

From the above table, it can be seen that there is a strong relationship between renqing and employee engagement, while the direct relationship between xinren and job performance was weaker.

It can be seen from Table 5 that, aside from ganqing having a negative relationship with employee engagement, there was no mediation between ganqing and job performance. With employee engagement as the mediator between renqing and job performance, the following figures ( $\beta = 0.066$ ;  $t$ -value = 3.165;  $p$ -value = 0.002) revealed that employee engagement significantly mediates the relationship. Additionally, the following figures ( $\beta = 0.021$ ;  $t$ -value = 2.526;  $p$ -value = 0.012) indicated that employee engagement mediated the role between xinren and job performance.



**Table 4.** Path coefficients of the structural model.

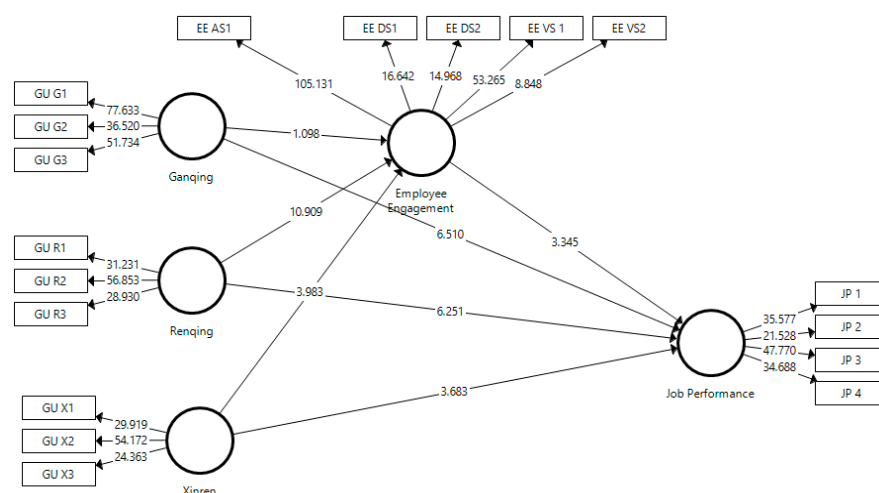
	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	p Values	Decision on Hypothesis
Employee Engagement→Job Performance	0.135	3.265	0.001	Accepted
Ganqing→Employee Engagement	−0.058	1.086	0.278	Rejected
Ganqing→Job Performance	0.307	6.518	0.000	Accepted
Renqing→Employee Engagement	0.492	10.968	0.000	Accepted
Renqing→Job Performance	0.324	6.399	0.000	Accepted
Xinren→Employee Engagement	0.159	4.093	0.000	Accepted
Xinren→Job Performance	0.132	3.763	0.000	Accepted

**Table 5.** Specific Indirect Effect.

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	p Values
Ganqing→Employee Engagement→Job Performance	−0.008	1.024	0.306
Renqing→Employee Engagement→Job Performance	0.066	3.165	0.002
Xinren→Employee Engagement→Job Performance	0.021	2.526	0.012

### Measurement Model

The figure below (Figure 2) displays the structural model analysis of the study.

**Figure 2.** Structural Model Analysis.

### 5. Discussion and Practical Implication

While the concept of guanxi is unfamiliar to most Ghanaians, its practice is not. In Ghana, certain behaviors or events are practically the same as the practice of guanxi in the Chinese setting and culture.

Guanxi in the Ghanaian context can also be obtained through religious and social activities [52]. These groups are structured in such a way that members are required to gather at a specific location regularly. As a result, members of the religious and social groups mingle and share thoughts or recommendations. Therefore, this provides an opportunity for employees to develop a stronger bond with their employers. Most Ghanaians join religious groups and social groups [30,53]. It is unsurprising that with the exemption of the relationship between ganqing and employee engagement, all other relationships of the GRX scale with both employee engagement and job performance were significant.

From the hypothesis, the following figures ( $\beta = 0.492$ ;  $t$ -value = 10.968;  $p$ -value = 0.000) were obtained as an indication of the relationship between renqing and employee engagement. This finding is similar to that of [7], who found that the more engaged leaders are in discharging their responsibilities, the better their relationship with

employees, hence, significantly influencing their job performance. This outcome also agrees with the research works of [1,29], who indicated that renqing motivates employees to lend help and go the extra mile, especially in their engagement in the workplace. In addition, this finding affirms the impact of the social exchange theory by revealing that employees mostly reciprocate or duplicate what they see [22]. Hence, an engaged supervisor gives the subordinates a model/standard as a guide to their progress.

Reciprocity is a need that is ingrained in the hearts of people, and it is highly imperative in the workplace. Previous literature has indicated that management that strengthens the relationship between leaders and their subordinates will always significantly affect employee performance due to the principle of reciprocity [23,54]. In that, one of the best offers employees seek to give their employers in return for their concern and good rapport is to ensure that they are more productive at the workplace.

The need for renqing ‘reciprocity’ can be traced to the ancient principle, ‘do unto others, what you expect them to do unto you.’ Hence, in the midst of a positive leadership relationship and care, employees are more than willing to go the extra mile to make their leaders proud [19,22]. This win-win outcome is achieved when there is a mutually beneficial relationship at the workplace. Hence, the SET is confirmed by revealing that developing a good dyad relationship is not biased—it definitely benefits both (leaders and subordinates) and, eventually, the organization as a whole.

With Employee Engagement serving as the mediator between ganqing and job performance, this research revealed a negative and non-significant relationship. This finding is contrary to the research of [55], who found that the relationship between guanxi exchange and work engagement of both nurses and police officers was positive. However, this finding is in line with the work of [32], who concluded that employees’ level of engagement in the workplace was negative when they had a high emotional attachment with their employers.

The possible reason for the mediator’s negative and non-significant relationship is the nature of guanxi in the workplace. Guanxi in the Ghanaian business community takes the form of recommendations and referrals. The likely challenges with this concept are that it can easily affect the employee’s perception, impression, and attitude. Employees may take the relationship for granted, which may directly affect their engagement level. Additionally, the emotional attachment of supervisors with their subordinates can undermine their ability to directly rebuke them.

In addition, the work of [56] indicated that there was a negative relationship between guanxi and perceived fairness. In their study, one of the main causes for such a relationship was favoritism. In the context of the study, it implies that the leaders’ rapport with subordinates will likely make them lenient with the subordinates or vice-versa.

Furthermore, due to employees’ social connection beyond the working environment, sometimes it becomes difficult to endure the stigmatization that may arise due to a harsh decision taken against an employee. This kind of challenge is prevalent primarily in the public sector where some employees have a lackadaisical attitude towards work [14,57]. Despite this, in an attempt to increase sustainability, organizational profitability and reduce engagement, a number of employers do not hesitate to rebuke and dismiss workers who care less about their engagement at work.

According to the research in [3], making decisions based on personal relationships is negatively related to employees’ engagement in the workplace. As a result, when employees perceive that HRM makes decisions on the basis of their relationships, their perceptions of procedural fairness can deteriorate. In other words, employees’ perceptions of ganqing procedures could be linked to the standards or guidelines regarding the decision-making of the HR. This indicates that management should be firm regardless of their relationship with employees.

### *Theoretical Implication*

This research adds to the literature by espousing that *guanxi* is highly imperative and needed in the workplace. Hence, irrespective of the context: whether Asian, Western, or African, relationships in the workplace are very important to all. As Confucius has shown, human beings are relationship beings, and our lives are related on the basis of our relationships [1]. In addition, this research added to the literature by measuring each of the three dimensions of the GRX scale and their impact on non-Chinese working environments.

From this research, it can be seen that employers initiate new relationships when they hire new employees [58]. As a result, it is their responsibility to work in close relations in order to nurture the relationships at the workplace. Furthermore, the various stakeholders of an organization need to ensure a solid relationship between employers and employees. This is primarily because, as other researchers have demonstrated, such relationships foster trust [20], encourage respect [12], foster togetherness [10], and emotionally bond employees to their work [1].

Any leader seeking to increase employee engagement in the 21st century must demonstrate genuine interest and confidence in their employees. The objective of achieving higher productivity can be challenging if leaders do not build positive relationships with their followers. Effective leaders use the insights gained from varied interactions with their staff to increase their morale and confidence.

In support of the social exchange theory, this research demonstrates how the relationship between employers and employees affects their level of reciprocity [23,37]. Thus, whenever *renqing* exists, there are mutual benefits at the workplace. Hence, building a positive dyad relationship is not self-serving—but rather benefits both parties (leaders and subordinates) and, ultimately, the organization as a whole.

### **6. Limitations and Further Research**

There are certain limitations to the findings of this research. The study could be designed to assess the GRX scale (*ganqing*, *renqing*, and *xinren*) through the use of alternative data collection procedures, such as interviews and experimental research. This will reveal the most viable GRX scale in the workplace. Additionally, a future study could test these variables in a specific industry or country.

The research design utilized in this study was cross-sectional, and it offered information about public and private sector organizations in Ghana at a particular time. As a result, conclusions are reached with respect to a specific period in time. Therefore, a longitudinal study could be considered for this study. Thus, data should be collected from organizations over a specified time period. This will serve as a means of determining whether or not the various time intervals have an effect on the outcomes.

In responding to the question, “Why are some leaders better at engaging employees than others?” While other researchers [4,5] found that the leader’s personality is a contributing factor, this research found that the rapport between supervisors and their subordinates (even beyond the workplace) is also a contributing factor. Hence, other researchers can focus on other factors that may trigger employee engagement and job performance.

### **7. Conclusions**

The primary goal of this research was to ascertain the impact of the GRX scale on employee engagement and job performance. The researchers sought to comprehend the working relationship by applying SSG (a working relationship beyond the workplace) to a non-Chinese workplace.

This research found that two out of the three dimensions of the GRX scale (*renqing* and *xinren*) significantly impacted employee engagement and job performance. Thus, the need to reciprocate a favor (*renqing*) and the level of trust (*xinren*) established between supervisors and their subordinates enhances employee engagement and job performance. Nevertheless, *ganqing* (the emotional aspect of *guanxi*) was not found to significantly impact both employee engagement and job performance.

With employee engagement serving as the mediator between ganqing and job performance, this research revealed a negative and non-significant relationship. This is mainly because emotional attachment can make it difficult for supervisors to rebuke or correct their subordinates. Furthermore, there is the tendency for subordinates to take their emotional connection with their supervisors for granted. Therefore, undermining their level of engagement.

Additionally, it was revealed that the need for reciprocity (renqing) is highly essential in the workplace because it can serve as a major booster for productivity and growth. Hence when supervisors show genuine concern about their subordinates and build a positive relationship with them even beyond the working environment, it will urge their subordinates to give out their very best towards enhancing the overall productivity of their organization.

In all, this research indicates that guanxi (a Chinese working relationship) is also applicable and helpful in an African working environment and serves as a conduit to promote employee engagement and job performance.

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