

# Empowering Employees: The Moderating Role of Perceived Organisational Climate and Justice

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Previous research suggests that empowering managerial practises have small and variable effects on employees' behaviours. The objective of this study is to assess whether organisational climate and justice perceptions moderate the relationship between supervisor empowering managerial practises (SEMPs) and employees' behavioural empowerment. Self-report data were gathered from a sample of 358 employees from three service-sector organisations in a cross-sectional study. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that both perceptions of organisational climate and justice interact with SEMPs in the prediction of employees' behavioural empowerment. As expected, SEMPs were more positively related to behavioural empowerment when perceptions of organisational supportive climate and justice were higher.

*Keywords:* employee empowerment, organisational climate, organisational justice, citizenship behaviours, moderation analysis

## Theoretical Background

Many business organisations are interested in empowerment because of its expected potential for increasing organisational effectiveness and innovation. Employee empowerment may be generally defined as “a participative process to utilise the entire capacity of workers, designed to encourage employee commitment to organisational success” (Cotton, 1996, p. 219). Concepts such as “high-involvement work practises” (Lawler, 1992), “employee participation” (Wagner, 1994), and “employee mobilisation” (Tremblay & Simard, 2006) are used interchangeably to insinuate this managerial philosophy. In practise, these concepts all involve supervisors encouraging first-line employees to become involved in decisions related to their work and giving them control over their work environment. This approach is believed to raise employees' motivation and eventually lead them to take initiative in securing or improving work effectiveness. Despite these claims, meta-analyses on employee participation have reported, on average, rather small effects of participation on performance ( $.10 \leq r \leq .26$ ; see Wagner, 1994).

As an explanation for these disappointing effects of participation on performance, researchers have proposed that environmental factors were not always aligned to reinforce empowerment in previous studies (Ledford & Lawler, 1994). Indeed, employee empowerment does not occur in an organisational vacuum. In other words, supervisors may attempt to increase employee empowerment by giving employees decision-making responsibilities and providing them with opportunities to become involved, yet other features of the organisational system (e.g., policies related to decision-making, to training and development, and to reward allocation) could be sending contradictory messages to employees. Some studies have suggested that participative practises that are integrated within organisational systems create more effective work environments than narrow and local empowerment efforts (Lawler, 1992; Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu, 1999). Therefore, the likelihood of supervisor empowerment practises to increase employee empowerment could be contingent on the presence of organisational supporting features. In this respect, Tremblay and Simard (2006) have suggested that effective empowerment requires the development of an organisational climate characterised by trust, support, justice, autonomy support, and recognition. In this article, we investigate the moderating role of both organisational climate and justice perceptions in the relationship between supervisor empowerment practises and employee behavioural empowerment.

## Supervisor Managerial Practises and Employee Behavioural Empowerment

Managers adopt empowerment approaches on the belief that these will create more employee ownership. Empowered employees are expected to conscientiously assume their work-related responsibilities and proactively initiate change in their work environment to increase work efficiency (Boudrias & Savoie, 2006; Tremblay & Wils, 2006). Empowerment could then be manifested

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through both “in-role” performance and “citizenship” performance. Consistently with these behavioural dimensions of empowerment, Boudrias and Savoie (2006) argue that a complete assessment of empowerment should investigate whether employees (a) conscientiously perform their job tasks, (b) display continuous improvement efforts in their job, (c) collaborate effectively with colleagues, (d) display continuous improvement efforts within the work group, and (e) become involved in the organisation to maintain and improve efficiency. The assessment of these behaviours amongst employees would potentially provide a behavioural indication of their level of empowerment and consequently serve as a criterion variable in order to measure the effectiveness of supervisor empowerment practises.

Managerial practises aimed at empowering employees have been greatly influenced by Lawler’s (1992) work on high-involvement work systems. To build such systems, Lawler suggests (a) delegating more decision-making power to first-line employees, (b) providing appropriate training for them, (c) giving them access to relevant business information, and (d) rewarding employees for achieving results. From these propositions, a number of studies have tried to identify empowering managerial practises that are under supervisors’ control (Arnold, Arad, Rhodes, & Drasgow, 2000; Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000). These studies have suggested that participative decision-making, leading by example, coaching, communicating information, and interacting positively with the team could all be effective supervisor empowering managerial practises (SEMPs). These propositions have been empirically supported following research showing that SEMPs or related managerial practises are positively correlated with a psychological empowerment criterion—defined in terms of meaningfulness, competence, autonomy, and impact experienced by employees (Konczak et al., 2000; Menon, 2001; Morrison, Jones, & Fuller, 1997). However, few studies have been conducted on SEMP effects with a behavioural empowerment criterion such as the one proposed by Boudrias and Savoie (2006). Such a behavioural criterion is important to consider because past research has shown weak, although significant, relationships between empowering managerial practises and behavioural outcomes such as performance (e.g., Wagner, 1994) and citizenship behaviours (e.g., Podsakoff, Mackenzie, & Bommer, 1996). Overall, we propose that these weak direct effects may be because of the presence of moderating variables between SEMPs and behavioural empowerment.

### **Perceived Organisational Climate and Justice as Moderators**

Climate can be defined as employee perceptions regarding the manner with which they are treated and/or managed in their organisation (Brunet & Savoie, 1999; Jones & James, 1979; James & James, 1989). These perceptions arise from individual interactions with environmental expectations. More precisely, climate may be viewed as a set of cognitive appraisals and interpretations made by individuals in relation to a specific target in their organisational context (e.g., safety, Zohar, 2003; innovation, Baer & Frese, 2003; human relations and participation, Likert, 1967). An organisational climate supports participation when employees perceive that their organisation considers them as important assets, recognises their contribution, values job autonomy, and provides

opportunities for development (Brunet & Savoie, 1999; Roy, 1989). This concept of supportive climate is similar to what other authors have called perceived organisational support (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990). A supportive climate seems to be critical for the implementation of effective high-involvement systems. A positive organisational climate is believed to drive motivation and increase the likelihood of employees allocating discretionary effort to their work (Neal, West, & Patterson, 2005).

A number of authors argue that empowerment begins at the top given that organisational systems influencing climate are largely set by upper management (Lawler, 1992; Ledford & Lawler, 1994; Shadure, Kienzle, & Rodwell, 1999; Tesluk et al., 1999). Hence, senior management’s attitudes and behaviours toward participation, in addition to supervisory practises, would play an important role in establishing a participative climate. Tesluk et al. (1999) conducted a study in a large state transportation department to measure the multilevel influence of climate on employee participation. They found that employees were more involved in participative initiatives (e.g., quality circle, task force) when both proximal unit climate and organisational climate were more participative. In this study, organisational climate moderated the effect of the participative climate instilled by the unit manager on employee empowerment. This interaction effect explains an additional 1% of the variance for a total proportion of 9% of the variance of employees’ involvement. This study clearly suggests that organisational climate matters when managers want to empower their work unit members. However, some elements of this study may be further investigated to extend its generalization. First, the researchers investigated determinants of employee participation at two organisational levels: top managers (district level) and middle managers (unit level), instead of focusing on the more proximal employee-manager relationship (i.e., the immediate supervision level). As such, they recommend that future research efforts focus more on these proximal relationships: “Because the proximate work unit tends to exert more influence [on individuals’ participation], this level of analysis deserves direct attention” (pp. 295–296). Second, the Tesluk et al. (1999) study was carried out in a single industrial organisation. Therefore, it is not clear whether their findings could be generalised to other kinds of organisations interested in empowerment, such as service-sector industries (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Lashley, 1999). Moreover, some of the instruments used in this study were quite specific to their sample (e.g., criterion measure, some climate items). Therefore, one of the goals of the present study is to test whether Tesluk’s findings with respect to the moderating role of organisational climate could be replicated in a study with different parameters; such as, a more heterogeneous sample, a closer focus on the immediate supervision level, and with different measures of the variables.

Studies done within the leader-member exchange paradigm (LMX), provide some additional evidence that organisational climate could moderate the relationship between immediate supervisor empowering organisations and employee empowerment. First, the Erdogan and Enders (2007) study showed that organisational support moderated the relationship between the quality of leader-member exchanges and in-role performance of employees in a grocery store chain. Their analyses revealed that LMX was related to employee performance only in contexts where organisational support was perceived as high. Second, Hofman, Morgeson, and Gerras (2003) found that a safety climate moderated the relation-

ship between the quality of LMX and employees' role enlargement perceptions with regard to safety in 25 military operational units. From these results, they concluded that if an organisation aims to encourage significant learning and improvement in a particular area, positive leader-subordinate relationships need to be coupled with a strategically relevant climate. This recommendation seems to be supported by studies showing that organisational climate moderates the effectiveness of the implementation of managerial practises, such as goal-setting (Zultowski, Arvey, & Dewherst, 1978), specific training programs (Hand, Richards, & Slocum, 1973; Burke, Chan-Serafin, Salvador, Smith, & Sarpy, 2008), and total quality management (Emery, Summers, & Surak, 1996). Based on these results, we formulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceived organisational climate will moderate the relationship between SEMP and employee behavioural empowerment. The relationship between SEMP and behavioural empowerment will be stronger in a more supportive organisational climate.

To extend Tesluk's findings and further our investigation of the moderating role of the organisational context in the empowerment process, we propose to examine another assessment of organisational support in predicting employee empowerment. More specifically, in the present study, we also investigate the role of organisational justice, which may be viewed as a measure of the work context partially overlapping the climate concept. Organisational justice is similar to climate because it also concerns the manner with which employees perceive being treated by management. However, justice may be considered a narrower concept than supportive climate, because it refers specifically to fairness and makes no reference to worker autonomy and organisational support. Organisational justice perceptions can target or be formed essentially based on the following: (a) fairness of rewards and outcomes allocation, (b) rules and procedures guiding decision-making processes and rewards allocation in the organisation, and (c) how managerial agents interact with employees in the administration of these rules and procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt & Shaw, 2005; Tyler & Bies, 1990). In the present study, we focus on employees' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice (respectively, a and b), rather than on the interactional aspects of justice (c). Interactional justice largely depends on interactions with the immediate supervisor (Bies, 2005) and, as such, is already covered by some facets of supervisor empowering practises (e.g., SEMP). A second goal of this study is therefore to test whether perceptions of distributive and procedural justice within the organisation interact with SEMP to influence employee empowerment, and to further assess how results compare with those for climate perceptions.

According to Lawler (1992), if employees perceive that reward allocation is unrelated to level of employee contribution (distributive justice) and if decision-making procedures are unclear or unfair (procedural justice), it would not be possible to sustain—in the long run—managerial practises based on empowerment. In those conditions, employee motivation would decrease and interest toward empowerment would eventually vanish. Therefore, even if justice perceptions are strongly related to organisational supportive climate ( $r$  between .52 and .78; Ambrose & Schminke, 2003; Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998;

Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002), we argue that justice is an important variable to measure and isolate when searching for distinct moderators of empowerment effectiveness. Furthermore, because distributive and procedural justice perceptions both refer to administrative rules and systems, they could be manipulated more straightforwardly by organisational system interventions in comparison to interactional justice, which is more clearly under the control of individual managers and to less tangible facets of climate (support, recognition, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

Few studies positioning organisational justice as a moderator variable have been conducted; yet, results of some recent studies seem promising. Interaction effects between justice and leadership styles more or less in line with SEMP were found in the prediction of different outcomes. In both laboratory and field studies, De Cremer (2006, 2007) found that transformational leadership interacts with procedural justice in the prediction of employee affective reactions (e.g., feeling valued and empowered in the organisation), while autocratic leadership interacts with distributive justice in the prediction of employee negative emotions (e.g., disappointment). Quality of leadership (e.g., LMX) was also found to interact with procedural justice in the prediction of behavioural outcomes such as organisational citizenship behaviours (Piccollo, Bardes, Mayer, & Judge, 2008). Furthermore, justice perceptions were found to interact with proximal job factors (job demands, trust) in the prediction of employee role enlargement (Chiaburu & Marinova, 2006; Janssen, 2001). Mainly, these studies suggest that low justice perceptions decrease the expected positive effects of managerial practises on various outcomes. However, none of these studies specifically established the moderating role of perceived organisational justice with regard to supervisors' managerial practises aimed at empowering employees. Based on these indirect empirical findings and on the considerations reviewed above, we formulate the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceived organisational justice (procedural and distributive) will moderate the relationship between SEMP and employee behavioural empowerment. The relationship between SEMP and behavioural empowerment will be stronger when perceived justice is higher.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited in three service sector organisations in Canada. The first organisation is a multinational company that supplies information and analysis services to the medical industry. Employees were surveyed in all departments and therefore represent various job types such as data analyst, statistician, account manager, and project manager. The second organisation is a multinational insurance company offering risk management and insurance services. Data were gathered from employees of various positions such as insurance broker, account manager, administra-

<sup>1</sup> In addition to this distinction, recent theory and research suggest that distributive and procedural justice present sufficient similarities to be grouped into a single construct (Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005), while presenting somewhat less similarity with the interpersonal facet of justice (Bies, 2005).

tive and office worker. The third organisation is an enterprise offering telecommunication services. Groups surveyed were mainly made up of office workers, customer service representatives, and call centre representatives.

The data collection procedure relied on a Web-based questionnaire. Employees first received an e-mail describing the project, the nature of their involvement, and the confidentiality of the process. Then, e-mails containing personalized access codes and a link to the Web-based questionnaire were sent to the employees. Three reminders were sent to participants. The participation rate was very high in all three organisations, ranging from 73% to 89%. Because the companies wished to obtain an overall picture of their employees' perceptions of empowerment, higher-level managers were also approached to complete the questionnaire. However, since we were mainly interested in empowerment of lower-level employees, these managers were removed from the sample ( $n = 10$ ) to ensure sample homogeneity.

Our final sample was made up of 358 individuals: 204 from the medical company (57%), 93 from the insurance company (26%), and 61 from the telecommunications company (17%). Sixty-three percent were women, 50% ranged between 36 and 55 years of age, and 47% were 35 years or younger. The vast majority of employees (94%) worked full-time, 50% had been in their current job for more than 2 years, while 43% had been in their organisation for over 5 years.

## Measures

A Web-based questionnaire was available in both French and English; 72% answered the questionnaire in English and 28% in French. Measures for this study were taken from three questionnaire sections of the entire eight-section 200-item questionnaire. More specifically, participants completed "Section 2 - Your Immediate Supervisor" (e.g., SEMP), "Section 7: Your Behaviours at Work" (e.g., behavioural empowerment), and "Section 8: Your Work Environment" (e.g., climate and justice). Because some instruments were available in English and others were available in French, the services of two bilingual translators were enlisted to ensure equivalence of the instruments via a translation/back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980). Reliabilities of instruments deemed comparable across languages (reported below for each measure) and therefore we pooled French and English respondents for subsequent analyses.

**Supervisor Empowerment Management Practises.** SEMPs were assessed with a 30-item questionnaire. This instrument is based on Lawler's (1992) high-involvement work practises and on questionnaires by Konczak et al. (2000) and Arnold et al. (2000), both specifically designed to measure supervisor empowerment practises. Items assessed whether participants felt that their supervisors (a) share power with employees (8 items, related to participation in decision-making, delegation, and accountability), (b) foster employees' skills development (11 items, related to autonomous decision-making, coaching, and leading by example), (c) communicate business orientations and relevant job information (3 items), (d) recognise and reward employees' performance (3 items), and (e) maintain positive relations with the group (5 items). Employees were asked to indicate the frequency (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) with which their supervisors demonstrate each behaviour. A sample item asks if the immediate supervisor "encourages us to

find our own solutions to work problems." Based on previous research showing that there are strong correlations between various types of supervisor empowerment practises (Ahearne, Mathieu, & Rapp, 2005; Arnold et al., 2000; Konczak et al., 2000), an overall score combining the 30 items was computed for this study ( $\alpha_{\text{English}} = .98$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{French}} = .98$ ).

**Employee behavioural empowerment.** Boudrias and Savoie's (2006) self-report questionnaire was used to measure employee empowerment behaviours. This 30-item questionnaire assesses whether employees (a) conscientiously perform their job tasks, (b) display improvement efforts in their job tasks, (c) effectively collaborate with others, (d) display improvement effort in their work group, and (e) get involved in the organisation (e.g., problem-solving groups). Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency (1 = *rarely* to 5 = *very often*) with which they performed the behaviours in the past 6 months when opportunities were available. A sample item is "make changes to improve efficiency in performing my tasks." An overall score, composed of the mean of each subscale, was computed reflecting the extent to which an employee displays empowered behaviours. This global score is supported by previous research showing significant subscale correlations and an acceptable second-order construct structure for this questionnaire (Boudrias & Savoie, 2006; Boudrias, Aubé, Rousseau, & Morin, 2009). The internal consistency of the 30-item questionnaire is very good in the present study ( $\alpha_{\text{English}} = .93$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{French}} = .92$ ).

**Organisational supportive climate.** Climate was assessed with a 16-item questionnaire adapted from Roy's (1989) climate questionnaire. Participants had to position themselves in relation to items pertaining to "the way they feel they are treated and/or managed in their work environment." Participants were asked to rate on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which they perceive being provided with autonomy support (e.g., "You are free to use your skills as you see fit"), with developmental opportunities (e.g., "You are given the opportunity to fully use your abilities at work"), and the extent to which they feel recognised and valued by their organisation (e.g., "You have the feeling of being a full member of your organisation"). Previous studies on this questionnaire report high correlations between climate subscales and the possibility of calculating a global score indicating the extent to which the organisational climate is perceived as supportive (Courcy & Savoie, 2004; Gilbert, Lebrock, & Savoie, 2008). Therefore, an overall score combining the 16 items was calculated. The internal consistency of this scale is very good in the present study ( $\alpha_{\text{English}} = .94$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{French}} = .96$ ).

**Organisational justice.** Two instruments were used to assess justice. Procedural justice was measured using seven items adapted from Moorman (1991). These items measure whether individuals perceive that decision-making processes are fair and transparent, involve all parties affected by the decision, and whether decisions are applied uniformly for all concerned parties (e.g., "All parties affected by the decisions are represented when decisions are made"). Distributive justice was measured with a 6-item questionnaire adapted from Price and Muller (1986). These items assess whether rewards offered to employees are awarded on the basis of individual merit, objective criteria, efforts, and responsibilities. (e.g., "The rewards offered to employees are awarded according to each person's responsibilities"). For both questionnaires, partici-

Table 1  
Means, SDs, Reliabilities, and Correlations Between Variables

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. SEMP	1–5	3.54	.83	(.98)			
2. Behavioural empowerment	1–5	3.67	.57	.16**	(.93)		
3. Supportive organisational climate	1–6	4.44	.87	.66**	.23**	(.95)	
4. Organisational justice	1–6	3.86	.91	.61**	.10	.70**	(.93)

Note. SEMP = supervisors' empowerment management practises. Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alphas) for the total sample are in parentheses.  
\*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.  $N = 358$  participants.

pants were asked to rate on a 6-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which they perceive that they are being treated fairly. These two instruments were successfully used, in a previous study, to create an overall score of justice (Duval, Ménard, Brunet, & Savoie, 2003). This score appears to be reliable in the present study ( $\alpha_{\text{English}} = .93$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{French}} = .93$ ).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Discriminant Validity

Descriptive statistics and correlations between the study variables are presented in Table 1. Consistent with the literature, we found a significant but small correlation between SEMP and employee behavioural empowerment ( $r = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the correlations observed between the predictor and both moderators were much higher (ranging from .61 to .70).

Because all variables were collected from the same source, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were done to test whether the variables (SEMP, climate, justice, and behavioural empowerment) indeed captured distinct constructs, relatively uncontaminated by the shared method variance artefact.<sup>2</sup> The hypothesised four-factor model (e.g., Model 1) was compared to five alternative models (Models 2–6). These alternate models proposed simpler and plausible factor structures by combining indicators into a lesser number of factors than the hypothesised model. These analyses were conducted with Mplus 5.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2008). The fit of all models was evaluated using various indices:  $\chi^2$  likelihood ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Values above .95 for the CFI and TLI, below .06 for the RMSEA, and below .08 for the SRMR indicate an adequate fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Vandenberg and Lance (2000) note that a RMSEA value between .06 and .08 may still indicate an acceptable fit.

The results of these CFAs, displayed in Table 2, show that the hypothesised four-factor model fit the data well, according to all fit indices, whereas every alternate model displayed inferior fit indices and significant chi-square test differences indicating, in the present case, significantly poorer fit to the observed data when compared to the hypothesised measurement model. However, even if we were able to differentiate climate and justice concepts in the measurement model, the correlation between the two latent factors was very high (0.86). Therefore, to avoid multicollinearity problems, the moderating role of climate and justice will be tested in two separate sets of regression analyses in this study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

### Analysis Across Organisations

Because the sample was composed of employees from three distinct organisations, the three subsamples were compared on the different variables to ensure their comparability. Significant differences were observed on all of the variables used in the present study: SEMP,  $F(2, 357) = 3.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ; behavioural empowerment,  $F(2, 357) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .05$ ; organisational justice,  $F(2, 357) = 8.01$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and supportive climate  $F(2, 357) = 5.35$ ,  $p < .05$ . Post hoc analyses indicate that the telecommunications employees perceived lower levels of SEMP, climate, and justice than employees from the other two organisations, and they reported lower levels of behavioural empowerment than the medical-sector employees. Given these results, organisational affiliation was controlled for in the main regression analyses by the inclusion of two dummy-coded variables representing the three organisations (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The small organisation-specific sample sizes ( $N = 204, 93, 61$ ) precluded more refined exploration of between-organisation variations. Furthermore, the treatment of contextual moderators at an individual level of analysis was appropriate in the present sample given the relatively low intraclass correlations (ICCs) found for climate ( $ICC1 = .040$ ) and justice ( $ICC1 = .063$ ) across organisations. These estimates indicate substantial variation in individual perceptions with regard to moderators within each organisation and are well below the median of .12 found by James (1982) who concluded that it is preferable to treat climate as an individual perception.

<sup>2</sup> Exploratory factor analyses (principal axis factoring, oblimin rotation) were performed on all instruments separately before conducting CFAs. These analyses showed that SEMP was unidimensional, climate was composed of two highly correlated dimensions (consideration and autonomy support), justice was composed of two correlated dimensions (procedural and distributive), and behavioural empowerment was composed of the five correlated expected dimensions. To maintain a favourable indicator-to-sample-size ratio in CFA analyses, we used dimension scores instead of items as indicators of climate, justice, and behavioural empowerment latent constructs. This procedure was advisable given the known unidimensionality of these subscales and follows the usual practises of parcelling used in the case of unidimensional subscales (Bandalos, 2002; Hagvet & Nasser, 2004; Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). Because SEMP was a unidimensional scale, five parcels (each containing six items) were created according to their item-total correlation: the item with the highest correlation was assigned to parcel 1, the second highest correlation to parcel 2, and so on (for an example of a similar procedure, see Bishop, Scott, Goldsby, & Cropanzano, 2005).

Table 2  
Results From Preliminary Discriminant Validity Analyses (CFA)

Model (list of combined dimensions)	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA 90%CI	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$ ( <i>df</i> ) from Model 1
Model 1: 4 correlated factors	220.941**	71	.966	.956	.077	.065–.088	.052	NA
Model 2: 3 correlated factors (J & S)	393.296**	74	.928	.911	.110	.099–.121	.072	172.355** (3)
Model 3: 3 correlated factors (J & C)	251.748**	74	.960	.950	.082	.071–.093	.056	30.807** (3)
Model 4: 3 correlated factors (S & C)	512.504**	74	.900	.878	.129	.118–.139	.079	291.563** (3)
Model 5: 2 correlated factors (J, S & C)	574.076**	76	.887	.865	.135	.125–.146	.082	353.135** (5)
Model 6: 1 factor (J, S, C & B)	973.713**	77	.797	.760	.180	.170–.191	.131	752.772** (6)

Note. J = organisational justice; S = supervisors' empowerment management practises; B = employees' behavioural empowerment; C = supportive organisational climate; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CI = Confidence Intervals; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Testing for the Moderation of Perceived Organisational Climate and Justice

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested through two distinct three-step hierarchical multiple regression analyses as proposed by Cohen et al. (2003). Both hypotheses were verified separately to avoid the potential multicollinearity problems created by the high correlation between organisational justice and climate. In addition, to further limit potential multicollinearity problems related to the testing of interaction effects, the independent variable and the moderator variables were converted to deviation scores (i.e., centered at their means) prior to the analyses. The two dummy-coded control variables (three organisations) were entered in the first step for both analyses. In the second step, the independent variable and the moderator (climate or justice) were entered simultaneously.<sup>3</sup> In the third step, an interaction term, created by the product of the predictor and moderator, was entered. Because we conducted two regression tests with similar moderators, a more stringent  $p$  ratio of .025 based on a Bonferonni correction ( $p < .05/2$ ) was set to conclude on the presence of a significant interaction effect.

In the first regression (Table 3), results revealed that perceived organisational climate did significantly predict employee empowerment<sup>4</sup>, whereas SEMP did not when both variables were considered simultaneously in step 2. Conversely, the results from the second regression (Table 4) revealed that SEMP did significantly predict employee empowerment, whereas perceived organisational justice did not in step 2. However, both interaction terms proved significant ( $p < .025$ ) in step 3, which precluded further investigations of these main effects. The interaction between SEMP and climate explains an additional 2.4% of employee empowerment, for a total of 9% of explained variance using adjusted indices. In the case of justice, the interaction term explains an additional 3% of the variance of empowerment, for a total of 6.7%.

To investigate how levels of the moderator affect the relationship between the predictor and the dependant variable, the Johnson-Neyman technique (Johnson, & Neyman, 1936; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006) allows for the identification of the specific values of the moderator at which the relationship between the dependent variable on the predictor moves from significance ( $p < .05$ ) to nonsignificance ( $p > .05$ ). For climate, the results indicated that the effect of SEMP on employee behavioural empowerment was nonsignificant when the value of perceived climate was located between  $-1.37$  and  $+1.12$  standard deviations ( $SD$ ) from the

mean and became significant outside these boundaries. To illustrate this interaction, the regression of behavioural empowerment on SEMP was plotted in Figure 1 at three different levels of perceived climate: at  $1.5 SD$  below the mean, at the mean, and at  $1.5 SD$  above the mean. These values were chosen to reflect areas both within and outside (on each side) of these boundaries. As can be observed in Figure 1, these results show that the effect of SEMP appears to be beneficial for employees exposed to a highly supportive organisational climate ( $b = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and deleterious for employees exposed to an unsupportive organisational climate ( $b = -.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ). For the justice regression, the boundaries outside of which the effects of SEMP on behavioural empowerment became significant were located between  $-2.94 SD$  and  $-.033 SD$  of the mean. It should be noted that only three participants obtained scores falling below this lower bound in the present study, making it irrelevant. Consequently, these results suggest that the effects of SEMP on employee behavioural empowerment become significant slightly below an "average" level of justice and then increase as a function of the rise in employees' perceptions of justice. To illustrate this effect, we plotted in Figure 2 the interaction for justice at the same levels as for climate ( $-1.5 SD$ , at the mean,  $+1.5 SD$ ) to facilitate comparison of results.

<sup>3</sup> Given the high correlation between climate and justice, we tested the moderating effect of a composite variable combining both climate and justice perceptions. These analyses supported the moderating effect of this composite variable:  $F(5, 352) = 7.015$ ,  $p < .01$ . The interaction between SEMP and the composite moderator explains an additional 2.8% of behavioural empowerment, for a total of 7.8% of explained variance using adjusted indices. Decomposing and plotting this interaction provide a picture that is somewhat a middle-ground between figures found for climate and justice separately (e.g., the region of significance was located outside of the interval between  $-1.85 SD$  and  $+0.60 SD$ ; simple slopes of SEMP at different levels of the moderator were:  $-1.5 SD = -.11$ ,  $p = .10$ ;  $M = .04$ ,  $p = .37$ ;  $+1.5 SD = .19$ ,  $p = .00$ ).

<sup>4</sup> The moderating effect of climate and justice was also examined for behavioural empowerment at the subdimension level following a reviewer request. Significant or marginally significant interactions were found for four of the five dimensions (the exception was involvement in the organisation). Patterns of interactions and simple slopes were highly similar (even for the nonsignificant one) to results presented in the article and confirmed the appropriateness of using an overall behavioural empowerment measure.

Table 3  
*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Testing the Moderating Role of Perceived Organisational Climate in the Relationship Between Supervisors' Empowerment Management Practise (SEMP) and Behavioural Empowerment*

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$ adj.	$R^2$ adj.	F	df
Step 1							
Organisation (dummy = 1)	-.203	.071	-.155**				
Organisation (dummy = 2)	-.061	.083	-.040	.017*	.017	4.050*	2, 355
Step 2							
SEMP	.008	.047	.012				
Perceived Supportive Climate	.151	.045	.229**	.049**	.066	7.323**	4, 353
Step 3							
SEMP $\times$ Perceived Climate	.107	.033	.169**	.024**	.090	8.089**	5, 352

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

### Discussion

The goal of this study was to assess whether organisational variables could increase the effect of SEMP on employees' behavioural empowerment. Results revealed that SEMP was more positively correlated with behavioural empowerment when perceptions of the work environment were more in favour of empowerment. This study therefore provides new empirical data that reinforce and complement extant studies on perceptions of organisational attributes moderating the relationship between managerial participative practises and employee behaviours. Because we relied on a diversified sample of workers from three service-sector organisations, this study provides evidence that past findings on the moderating role of organisational climate could be generalised beyond the industrial sector and beyond the specific parameters of the Tesluk et al. (1999) study. Furthermore, this study contributes to empowerment literature by also examining the role of perceived justice, because—to date—few specific empirical studies have been conducted on the moderating role of justice in the empowerment process.

The hypothesis that perceived organisational climate moderates the influence of SEMP on employees' behavioural empowerment is supported in this study. When employees perceive that the organisational climate is highly supportive of participation, SEMP is positively related to employee empowerment. However, when climate is perceived as moderately supportive, SEMP is unrelated to employee empowerment. Worse yet, results suggest that there is a slight negative relationship when supervisors display a lot of

empowerment practises in conditions where organisational climate is perceived as unsupportive. The latter unexpected results might be explained by the possibility that SEMP could be perceived by employees as being unadapted to the organisational reality, or even as manipulation in the absence of an organisationally supportive climate (see Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers, & Goodman, 1994). Nonalignment between supervisory practises and organisational climate could create mistrust or cynicism amongst employees which might tend to reduce their initiative to a minimum level.

This study also shows that organisational justice moderates the effect of SEMP on employees' behavioural empowerment. The more employees perceived procedures and distribution of outcomes as transparent and fair, the more SEMP influenced employee empowerment. SEMP were significantly correlated to empowerment when perceptions of organisational justice were moderate and high. However, there was no relationship between SEMP and employee empowerment when perceptions of organisational justice were low.

The different patterns of interaction found for justice and climate are intriguing and warrant some discussion. We offer the following explanations to explain why climate, as opposed to justice, had a negative influence on the SEMP-behavioural empowerment relationship: interpersonal facets of climate (recognition, respect, support) might be more important than administrative procedures (distributive and procedural justice) when employees evaluate whether intentions behind empowerment practises are genuine or legitimate. Moreover, climate perceptions might be

Table 4  
*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Testing the Moderating Role of Perceived Organisational Justice in the Relationship Between Supervisors' Empowerment Management Practise (SEMP) and Behavioural Empowerment*

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$ adj.	$R^2$ adj.	F	df
Step 1							
Organisation (dummy = 1)	-.203	.071	-.155**				
Organisation (dummy = 2)	-.061	.083	-.040	.017*	.017	4.050*	2, 355
Step 2							
SEMP	.104	.045	.151*				
Organisational Justice	.010	.042	.016	.020*	.037	4.400**	4, 353
Step 3							
SEMP $\times$ Justice	.120	.034	.186**	.030**	.067	6.100**	5, 352

\*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed.

formed more on a day-to-day basis, while justice perceptions might be related to less frequent events or critical ones (Brunet & Savoie, 1999). If climate perceptions are indeed rooted in daily reality, it would be reasonable to argue that they are more readily accessible to employees and thusly have the potential to change the meaning of SEMP. As for low justice perceptions, it might be possible that low administrative fairness is more commonly accepted as being somewhat part of organisational life. As such, some authors argue that organisational politics are prevalent perceptions amongst employees (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Witt, Andrews, & Kacmar, 2000). Therefore, low administrative justice within the organisation may not represent a strong cue for (re)interpreting the immediate supervisors' intentions. On a cautionary note, it should be mentioned that we did not measure facets of organisational justice pertaining to the fairness perceived in the interpersonal treatment of employees (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001). This might prevent us from concluding too prematurely that organisational climate and the overall organisational justice construct exert differential effects in the empowerment process.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This study has some limitations that should be mentioned. First, all variables were measured by self-report questionnaires, which may provide an inflated estimate of correlations between variables due to common method variance. In this study, we observed strong relationships between perceptions of organisational context variables and supervisor managerial practises. Even if this situation could be considered as "normal," because a supervisor is someone who represents the organization<sup>5</sup>, a greater effort should be made to try to differentiate these variables. As such, future studies should try to minimise this common method bias by relying on different sources to assess supervisor practises, moderators, and behavioural empowerment. For example, different employees could have provided information on SEMP and on moderators if a group-centered analytic approach would have been taken (e.g., see Tesluk et al., 1999). This was not feasible in the present study because organisations were reluctant to isolate specific supervisors

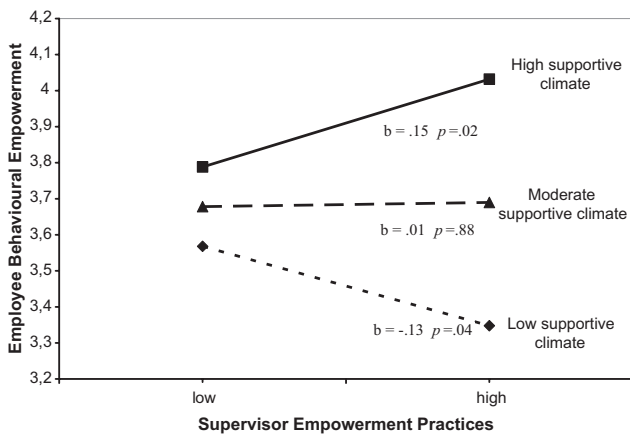


Figure 1. Relationship between supervisor empowerment practises and employee behavioural empowerment for low, moderate, and high levels of supportive climate.



Figure 2. Relationship between supervisor empowerment practises and employee behavioural empowerment for low, moderate, and high levels of justice.

in the analysis of results. Another way for minimising the common method bias could have been to solicit an external source to assess employees' behavioural empowerment. However, there is some evidence that common method variance was not a major threat that could invalidate the present results. First, results of CFAs showed that SEMP could be successfully differentiated to each moderator (climate and justice) in our measurement model, suggesting that the use of common methods might not have exerted a very strong force in explaining the relationships between the variables in this study. Second, the correlation between SEMP and behavioural empowerment found in this study ( $r = .16$ ) is more similar in magnitude to the average participation-performance correlation found in multisource studies ( $r = .11$ ) than in single-source or percept-percept studies ( $r = .44$ ) (Wagner, 1994).

Second, this study was based on a cross-sectional design. Therefore, it is not possible to make any claim on the causality of the relationships between the variables. Intervention designs and longitudinal research should be conducted in order to demonstrate if SEMP have different effects on employee empowerment when they are implemented in a context of more positively versus more negatively perceived organisational climate and justice.

Third, some concerns might also be raised about the magnitude of effects found in our study. Interaction effects explained between 2.4% and 3% of additional variance in the prediction of employees' behavioural empowerment. However, these results compare favourably with the typical range of interaction sizes of 1% to 3% found in social science literature (McClelland & Judd, 1993). Moreover, this additional variance seems to be important if we consider that the direct effects of SEMP and moderators on empowerment were also relatively low (2.0% and 4.9%). Nevertheless, a large proportion of the variance of employee behavioural empowerment remains unexplained, as in previous studies (Tesluk et al., 1999; Wagner, 1994). As such, one could argue, as did

<sup>5</sup> See also high correlations found in other studies for justice and perceived support targeted both at supervisor and at organisation levels (e.g., Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Liao & Rupp, 2005).



Wagner (1994), that effects found with regard to the relationship between participative practises and employee behavioural outcomes are so small that their practical interest remains limited. Albeit limited, we believe that these results still shed light on the organisational contexts in which supervisor participative practises can influence employee empowerment.

As such, our results suggest that the modest influence of supervisor practises on employee behavioural empowerment could be enhanced when employees perceive that the organisational climate is more supportive and when they perceive higher justice in organisational systems. In contrast, in an unsupportive organisational context, supervisor managerial practises would have no influence on employee empowerment at best. Therefore, if both perceived climate and justice are low, managers should first target intervention strategies toward improving these perceptions before attempting to display empowering practises.

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## Résumé

Les recherches antérieures suggèrent que les pratiques managériales d'autonomisation ont des effets restreints et variables sur le comportement des employés. L'objectif de cette étude est d'évaluer si le climat organisationnel et la perception de la justice modèrent la relation entre les pratiques managériales d'autonomisation des patrons (PMAPs) et l'autonomisation comportementale des employés. Des données autorapportées ont été recueillies auprès d'un échantillon de 358 employés provenant de trois organisations du secteur des services dans une étude transversale. Des analyses de régression hiérarchique ont indiqué que les perceptions du climat organisationnel et de la justice interagissent avec les PMAPs dans la prédiction de l'autonomisation comportementale des employés. Tel qu'attendu, les PMAPs étaient plus positivement reliées à l'autonomisation comportementale quand les perceptions d'un climat de soutien organisationnel et de justice étaient élevées.

*Mots-clés* : autonomisation des employés, gestion participative, climat organisationnel, justice organisationnelle, comportements de citoyenneté, analyse de modération

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