SAUDI WOMEN EMPLOYEES' PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT, DOES IT MATTER?

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ABSTRACT: *The authors investigate Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment as a mediating mechanism for the influence of empowerment leadership behavior on Saudi women employees' intention to quit. In addition, the moderator role of relational climate on the relationship that reflects the influence of Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment on their intention to quit is also examined. This empirical study found that empowering leadership has a direct negative influence on Saudi women employees' intention to quit. Also, psychological empowerment was influenced positively by empowering leadership. Contrary to what was expected, the negative impact of psychological empowerment on the intention to quit was not supported. Thus, there is no mediating role for psychological empowerment in the relationship between empowering leadership and the intention to quit. Regarding the relational climate, it played a role as a moderating variable in the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and the intention to quit when it has a low level. Valuable theoretical and managerial implications were discussed in the discussion part.*

Keywords: empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, relational climate, intention to quit.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the different work environments, no one can deny the significant impact of women's empowerment. Thus, this research highlights a theoretical model that considers empowering leadership as one of the antecedents of Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment and their intention to quit as one of its consequences. Also, the relational climate is examined as a moderator in the relationship between Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment and their intention to quit. According to Alasgah and Rizk [1], psychological empowerment is one of the kinds of women's empowerment. Psychological empowerment is defined as "a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact" [2](p. 1444). Meaning refers to the value of a job's objective based on how a person assesses it through their principles [3]. Competence reflects a person's faith in terms of their ability to do tasks skilfully, and it is known as self-efficacy [4]. At the same time, self-determination reflects a person's realization that they have their own option to start and regulate different activities [5]. The impact is a person's effect level that they have on the different work consequences [6].

For many reasons, highlighting women's issues in the workplace is a significant topic. For instance, gender is one issue that women encounter in the workplace. In addition, it considers one of the causes of gender inequality [7]. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, Saudi women leaders do not have sufficient empowerment [8]. In addition, women play a role in economic development [9]. According to Bhoganadam et al. [10], women's empowerment and economic development are reciprocal. This relationship means enhancing women's capability to enter many development elements, such as obtaining opportunities and education [10]. Currently, women's empowerment has become an important issue, in the Saudi context, especially with its new vision, Saudi vision 2030. Enhancing the talents of Saudi women and ensuring suitable opportunities for their future are one of the main responsibilities of the Saudi government [11].

The model of intrinsic task motivation, developed by Thomas and Velthouse [3], and social exchange theory [12] are considered the main theoretical foundation of this research. This empirical study aims to increase the literature on empowerment areas in general and psychological empowerment in three ways. First, this research concentrates on women employees' psychological empowerment due to the lack of literature related to women empowerment and their role in the real work environment. Second, relational climate, developed by Rochford and Boyatzis [13], has never been examined as a moderator construct in the relationship between psychological empowerment and attention to quitting. Third, various styles of leadership have an inverse influence on the intention to quit, such as responsible leadership [14], transformational leadership and transactional leadership [15, 16], and ethical leadership [17]. In this research, the focus will be on empowering leadership style to examine its influence on Saudi women employees' intention to quit directly and through their psychological empowerment as a mediator. Thus, three main questions are highlighted: (a) what is the impact of empowering leadership on Saudi women employees' intention to quit? (b) What is the impact of psychological empowerment as a mediator construct in the relationship between empowering leadership and the intention to quit? (c) What is the impact of relational climate as a moderator construct in the relationship between psychological empowerment and intention to quit?

The first section of this article discusses the study's hypotheses that examine three relationships: the direct impact of empowering leadership on Saudi women employees' attention to quit, the mediating impact of the psychological empowerment of Saudi women employees on the relationship between empowering leadership and their intention to quit, and the moderating role of relational climate in the relationship between Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment and their intention to quit. Then, the second section is the methodology, which is followed by the findings, discussion, and theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the last section summarizes the study's limitations followed by the research conclusion.

2. EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP AND INTENTION TO QUIT

The model in Fig. 1 clarifies the research's hypotheses. In this section, the model will be discussed in detail.
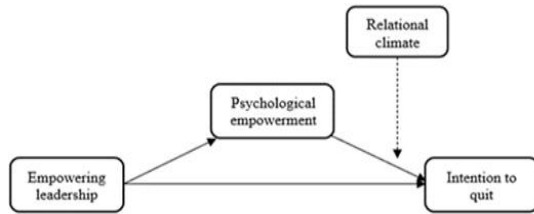

Figure 1. Research Framework

Researchers defined empowering leadership as a procedure of applying terms to increase power-sharing with an employee through describing the employee's work importance, introducing a large scope of independency in terms of making decisions, showing trust in the abilities of an employee, and eliminating any obstacles that affect the performance [18-21]. According to Crossley et al. [22], the intention to quit reflects the self-estimation of the staff regarding their possibility of quitting the company in perpetuity soon [23].

Empowering leadership behavior negatively influences some negative outcomes (e.g., turnover intention). For instance, many scholars found that leadership empowering behavior has an inverse influence on the intention to quit [24, 25]. At the same time, Cziraki *et al.* [26] found how leader empowering behavior indirectly influences turnover intention through inter-professional collaboration. As well as empowering leadership has a negative impact on turnover intention based on a recent empirical study by Ouyang et al. [27]. Empowering leadership also has a moderating effect on the relationships that are related to the intention to leave. For instance, Redelinghuys and Botha [28] proved the moderating impact of leader empowering behavior on the relationship between job satisfaction and intention to quit.

Based on these empirical studies, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 1. Empowering leadership negatively influences Saudi women employees' intention to quit.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AS A MEDIATOR

In different studies, psychological empowerment plays a crucial role as an independent variable [29-31] and mediator variable [29, 32-34]. Also, it plays a meditating mechanism in the relationship between different leadership styles, such as authentic leadership [35], transformational leadership [36], and servant leadership [34], and different outcomes. Correspondingly, psychological empowerment moderated the relationships related to turnover intentions, such as its moderating role in the relationship between organizational commitment and turnover intentions [37].

In this research, the mediating mechanism of psychological empowerment in the relationship between empowering leadership and intention to quit will be investigated, although this kind of leadership has a significant and negative impact on intention to quit. On the one hand, empowering leadership influences psychological empowerment [38-40]. On the other

hand, psychological empowerment has an inverse impact on turnover intention [41-43].

Based on these empirical studies, the following hypotheses are suggested:

Hypothesis 2a. Empowering leadership positively influences Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 2b. Saudi women employees' psychological empowerment negatively influences Saudi women employees' intention to quit.

4. RELATIONAL CLIMATE AS A POSSIBLE MODERATOR

The relational climate is defined as "shared employee perceptions and appraisals of policies, practices, and behaviors affecting interpersonal relationships in a given context" [44](p. 36). There are different kinds of climates within the organization environment that play a crucial moderating role in different relationships. For instance, the supportive climate was examined as a moderator variable on the relationship between knowledge management, including knowledge sharing and knowledge creation, and innovativeness [45]. The findings proved that a supportive climate only moderates the relationship between knowledge sharing and innovativeness [45]. Another climate is competitive psychological empowerment, which moderates the relationship between artificial intelligence and robotics awareness of the staff and their turnover intentions [46]. In addition, relational climate moderates two different relationships: the relationship between employee state mindfulness and employee ostracism and the indirect relationship between ethical leadership and employee ostracism [47]. As well as, relational climate plays mediating role in different studies. For instance, organizational shared vision, which is considered one of the relational climate sub-dimensions, played a mediating role in two relationships: the relationship between the ideal self and career satisfaction of women and the relationship between the ideal self and women's career commitment [48]. In addition, Berg [49] found that organizational shared vision has a complimentary mediating impact on two relationships: the relationship between personal purpose and organizational commitment and the positive relationship between company purpose and organizational commitment

Based on these empirical studies, the following hypothesis is suggested:

Hypothesis 3. Relational climate moderates the relationship between Saudi women's psychological empowerment and their intention to quit.

5. MATERIALS AND METHODS
5.1. Research Context
The data collection tool is a self-reported questionnaire based on established scales. Google survey was used as a tool to collect the required data. The research's participants were Saudi women employees who work in the private sector in Saudi Arabia. The target sample for this research is at least 200 employees to apply structural equation modeling [50]. A total of 270 responses were collected. The participants' demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. All

participants were female since this study focuses on Saudi women's psychological empowerment. All the participants were Saudi, and most of them reported an age range of 25-35. Regarding the educational level of the participants, 1.5% had high school, 8.5% had a diploma, 77.4% had a college degree, 12.2% had a master's degree, and 0.4% had a doctoral degree. For the social status, 64.1% were single, and this percentage represents most of the participants. Regarding years of experience, 55.9% had less than 5 years, 32.6 % had 5-10 years, 9.6% had 10-15 years, and 1.9% had more than 15 years.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Characteristics (N=270)

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender Female		270	100%
Nationality Saudi Non-Saudi		270	100%
Age Less than 25 25-35 35-45 45-50 More than 55		29 190 49 2 0	10.7% 70.4% 18.1% 0.7% 0%
Educational level High school Diploma College degree Master degree Doctoral Degree		4 23 209 33 1	1.5% 8.5% 77.4% 12.2% 0.4%
Social status Single Married Divorced Widow		173 82 15 0	64.1% 30.4% 5.6% 0%
Years of experience Less than 5 years 5-10 years 10-15 years More than 15 years		151 88 26 5	55.9% 32.6% 9.6% 1.9%

5.2. Measures
All the items were translated into Arabic by applying forward and backward translation techniques. The forward translation was conducted by Saudi native experts, while the backward translation was conducted by bilingual experts. Besides, this bilingual expert did not have access to the Arabic version to avoid any mistakes in the meaning [51]. All the constructs' items are rated on a five-point scale, varying from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In addition, all the variables have acceptable reliabilities [52].

5.2.1. Empowering Leadership
It is measured by using the "12-items scale" developed by Ahearne et al. [18]. This scale was 10 items, but Zhang and Bartol [35] adjusted this scale by adding two items; therefore, the total items became 12 items. This scale has four subdimensions (enhancing the meaningfulness of work, fostering participation in decision making, expressing

confidence in high performance, and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints). Regarding Cronbach's alpha, it was equal to .92. In this empirical research, Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .932.

5.2.2. Psychological Empowerment
It is measured by using the "12-items scale" established by [2]. The scale includes four main subdimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact). The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the overall empowerment construct was equal to .72 and .62 for the two samples that were examined by Spreitzer, respectively. In this empirical research, Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .841.

5.2.3. Relational Climate
It is measured by using the "12-items scale" developed by Rochford and Boyatzis [13]. The scale consists of three subdimensions (Shared Vision, Compassion, and Relational Energy). The Cronbach's alpha of the relational climate scale was .93. In this empirical research, Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .943.

5.2.4. Turnover Intention
It is measured by using the "5-items scale" for Crossley et al. [22]. The Cronbach's alpha of intention to quit scale was .89. In this empirical research, Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .895.

5.2.5. Control Variables
Education level was used as a control variable to examine its effect on psychological empowerment [53].

5.3. Data analysis
In this research, Mplus was utilized to instigate the relationships among the research's variables, empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, relational climate and intention to quit. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to calculate the data descriptive statistics

6. RESULTS
6.1. Descriptive Statistics
Table 2 includes the number of participants, minimum, maximum, means, and standard deviations of all the variables of this research. Regarding normality, the authors have applied an MLM estimator to correct nonnormality if there is.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
EL	270	1.00	5.00	2.9537	.96944
PE	270	1.67	5.00	3.5478	.70102
RC	270	1.00	5.00	2.9710	.98259
ITQ	270	1.00	5.00	3.3652	1.04975

Note(s). EL- Empowering leadership, PE- Psychological empowerment, RC- Relational climate, ITQ- Intention to quit.

6.2. Primary Analyses
Mplus statistical software [54] is used to analyze the measurement and structural models.

6.3. Measurement Model
Confirmatory Factor Analysis CFA was applied to study the measurement model. CFA is a part of SEM and is applied to test the consistency between data and the hypothesized model [55]. CFA was conducted individually for the research's variables (EL, PE, RC, and ITQ). Then, Goodness of Fit GOF

indices was computed and compared with the GOF criteria. As shown in Table 3, according to the two-index rule used in this research to evaluate the goodness-of-fit of CFA, the second order of empowering leadership had a tenable model fit because of SRMR ≤ 0.06 and CFI ≥ 0.95 [56]. In addition, the second order of psychological empowerment had a model fit because both criteria of the two-index rule were met (SRMR ≤ 0.06 and CFI ≥ 0.95) and (SRMR 0.06 ≤ and RMSEA ≤ 0.06) [56]. Also, the second order of relational climate has a good model fit because the first criteria of the two-index rule were met (SRMR ≤ 0.06 and CFI ≥ 0.95 [56]. Finally, the one-factor structure of intention to quit had also a good model fit because the first criteria of the two-index rule were met [56].

Table 3. GOF Indices for Study Scales

The goodness of Fit (GOF) Index	CFA						90% CI for RMSEA	
	x^2	df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	LL	UL
Empowering leadership	129.060	50	0.965	0.953	0.053	0.077	0.060	0.093
Psychological empowerment	95.146	50	0.968	0.958	0.045	0.058	0.040	0.075
Relational climate	130.842	51	0.963	0.952	0.050	0.076	0.060	0.092
Intention to quit	34.404	5	0.972	.943	0.033	.148	.103	.196

6.4. Validity and Reliability of Measurement Models
6.4.1. Reliability (Internal Consistency)
Cronbach alpha is the most known measurement method to assess internal consistency. The alpha value for each scale must exceed 0.70 [52]. All alpha values were greater than 0.7, indicating acceptable reliability for measurement models.
6.4.2. Convergent and Discriminant Validity
Convergent validity is the assessment to measure the level of correlation of many indicators of the same variable. Composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) should be considered to establish convergent validity. AVE value must exceed the value of 0.50 to be sufficient for convergent validity [52]. The value of CR for each variable El, PE, RC, and ITQ was .967, .953, .962, and .905, respectively. While the value of AVE for each variable El, PE, RC, and ITQ were .714, .633, .684, and .661, respectively. All the values of CR are greater than > 0.70, which supports the convergent validity of the study scales as well as internal consistency [52]. The standardized factor estimates of the scales' items were ranging from (0.44 to 0.96) and they are accepted.

Regarding discriminant validity, it was assessed by comparing the root square values of AVE, which must be greater than correlations between latent variables. Since this condition was achieved, it could be concluded that the research variables had an acceptable discriminant validity.

Table 4. Composite Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Discriminant Validity

	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
1-EL	.967	.714	**.845**			
2- PE	.953	.633	.500**	**.795**		
3- RC	.962	.684	.681**	.385**	**.827**	
4- ITQ	.905	.661	-.588**	-.206**	-.652**	**.813**

Note(s): ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

6.5. Common Method Bias (CMB)
Harman's single factor test for CMB was applied in this paper to detect any bias. The value of the total variance explained was less than 50% (38.888%). Thus, there is no common method bias, and the data is ready for analysis.
6.6. Structural Model
A statistical path analysis was used in the framework of structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the hypotheses of this study. Two models were applied in this research. The first model includes the first and second hypotheses, the direct and mediation effects. At the same time, the second model includes the moderation effect. Both models had a good model fit. In addition, education level was used as a control variable in model 1 to examine its effect on psychological empowerment.
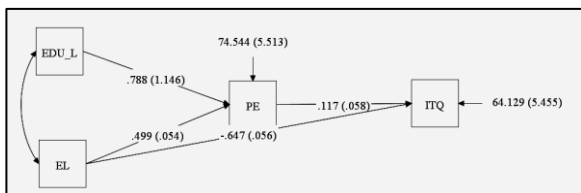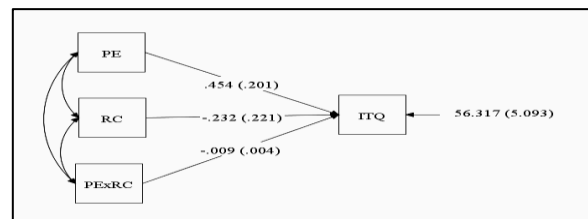

Figure 2. Model 1

Figure 3. Model 2

Table 5. GOF Indices for Study's Models

The goodness of Fit (GOF) Index	x^2	df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA	90% CI for RMSEA	
							LL	UL
Model 1	1.263	0	0.016	0.993	0.000	0.031	0.000	0.168
Model 2	0.000	0	1.000	1.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 6. Hypotheses Results

H	Estimates	SE	Results
H1	-0.647*	0.051	Significant and supported
H2a	0.499*	0.049	Significant and supported
H2b	0.117*	0.057	Significant but not supported
Moderating effect			
H3	0.156*	0.064	Significant at a low level of RC but not supported

Note: * p-value < 0.05.

Based on Table 6, this study found a negative and significant relationship between empowering leadership and the intention to quit. Thus, H1 was supported. The impact of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment was positive and significant. Thus, H2a was supported as well. Although the relationship between psychological empowerment intention is significant, it has a positive effect, and this result is contrary to what is expected. Therefore, H2b was not supported. As a result, there is no mediating effect for psychological empowerment. Regarding the moderating effect, it was examined by dividing the moderating effect into three levels: low level = 35, which is 1.5 SD below the mean; medium level = 50, which is equal to the mean and high level = 65, which is 1.5 SD above the mean. Based on the unexpected results of H1, the positive relationship between PE on ITQ, moderated by RC, which ranges from 35 to 75, is (a) statistically significant at the lowest value, RC = 35 (p = 0.014), (b) decreases to statistically non-significant at the medium value, RC = 50 (p = 0.583), and (c) remains to decrease and statistically nonsignificant at the highest value, RC = 65 (p = 0.314) as shown in Table 7 and Figure 4. Regarding the control variable "educational level", its impact on psychological empowerment was insignificant.

Table 7. Moderating Effect

Moderating effect	Estimates	SE	Results
CELM	0.156	0.064	Significant but not supported
CEMM	0.028	0.052	Nonsignificant
CEHM	-0.099	0.099	Nonsignificant

Note(s):   CELM= Conditional effect at a low level of moderator, CEMM= Conditional effect at a medium level of moderator, CEHM= Conditional effect at a low level of moderator.
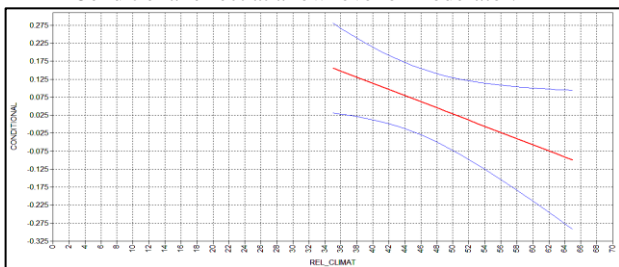

Figure 4. Plot Graph for Moderating Effect

7.   Discussion and Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research addressed the direct impact of empowering leadership on intention to quit and the mediation impact of psychological empowerment on the relationship between empowering leadership and intention to quit. The moderating impact of relational climate on the relationship between psychological empowerment and intention to quit was also examined. This research makes a significant theoretical contribution to the existing literature on psychological empowerment. Based on social exchange theory [12], which concentrates on the social exchange between different parties, this paper proved the significant and negative impact of empowering leadership on Saudi women employees' intention to quit. Put differently, an increase in applying empowering leadership style by leaders will negatively affect the Saudi women employees' intention to quit. This finding is consistent with previous findings of recent research [27]. Regarding the moderating effect, this research found that psychological empowerment has a positive relationship with ITQ only if the relational climate is low.

Based on our findings, this research has many practical implications that will be useful for practitioners in real work environments. First, because work staff is recently considered one of the most important assets and the backbone of the organization, the traditional autocratic leadership style has been replaced by the democratic leadership style [57]. Thus, managers need to adopt a democratic leadership style such as empowering leadership to retain their employees, especially the talented staff. As it is found in this paper, applying empowering leadership style has a negative impact on the intention to quit. Empowering leadership concentrates more on empowering employees; thus, it is possible to have a high linkage with empowerment compared to a broad leadership style like transformational leadership [58]. Therefore, it is recommended for managers to apply such a leadership style, which affects a positive way in many outcomes within the work environment, such as psychological empowerment [59-61] and this is found in this research. Although psychological empowerment in this study has a significant positive impact on the intention to quit, this is a surprising result because just the opposite was reported in some previous studies [41-43]. In this sense, this finding of study can contribute to the literature on psychological empowerment. Furthermore, it is

important to managers as it can help them find a way to retain the employees who feel psychological empowerment and benefit from it, instead of letting them think about quitting the organization. Also, the human resources department should develop practices based on empowering employees to keep them with the organization. Regarding the mediating impact of psychological empowerment on the relationship between empowering leadership and intention, it did not achieve since the relationship between psychological empowerment and intention to quit was not supported. Based on the moderating findings, it is recommended for managers to increase the level of relational climate because it is expected to reduce the effect of the positive relationship between psychological empowerment and intention to quit.

8. Study Limitations

There is no study without limitations. Accordingly, this study relied on cross-sectional data. Thus, to approve the direction of the research's relationships, it is recommended to apply longitudinal research. This kind of research will explain the causal relationship accurately. In addition, this study was applied in one sector, the private sector, in Saudi Arabia and the sample size was small. Therefore, it will be difficult to generalize the finding of this research.

9. CONCLUSION

Although the limitations of this study, it is believed the present research added value to the literature on women employees' psychological empowerment, empowering leadership, intention to quit, and relational climate. This study reflects the importance of psychological empowerment in the workplace, and managers need to consider this concept in their policies. It is recommended for future research to apply this study in different contexts and compare the finding of their study with this study. Although this study did not report a common method bias, it is recommended to collect the data from different sources, e.g., supervisors and employees, to reduce common method bias in future research [62]. Finally, regarding the unexpected result of the positive effect of psychological empowerment on the intention to quit, future researchers are encouraged to apply a qualitative study in order to investigate the reasons behind this finding.

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