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Preference for Managerial Boundary Setting in Relation to Empowerment: Adding Clarity to the Role of Boundaries

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This study explores the role of manager and employee preference for managerial boundary setting in empowerment. Research has shown a clear relationship between managers' empowerment practices and employee psychological empowerment, but confusion persists in the empowerment literature about the role played by boundaries in creating empowerment. We add clarity to the role of boundary setting by considering how the individual difference variable of manager and employee preference for managerial boundary setting impacts empowerment. Results indicate that higher preference for managerial boundary setting was associated with greater utilization of empowerment practices by managers and with greater psychological empowerment of employees. For managers there was a positively-accelerating quadratic relationship between preference for managerial boundary setting and empowerment practices. We also confirm the positive relationship between managers' empowerment practices and employee psychological empowerment, and we found that employee preference for boundary setting did not moderate this relationship, except in the model for competence. *Organization Management Journal*, 11: 212–226, 2014. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2014.963833

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Over the past 25 years, empowerment has been widely studied by organizational researchers and written about extensively by practitioners (Block, 1987; Randolph, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Wallace, Johnson, Mathieu, & Paul, 2011). Yet there remains a great deal we do not know about how empowerment works in organizations and how managers can create an environment in which employees can be empowered (Spreitzer, 2008). In particular, there continues to be confusion in the empowerment literature about the role played by managerial boundary setting in an empowering environment, and it is vital to understand the role that boundaries play in creating an empowering context for employees. Managers like the idea of greater employee empowerment, but they often fear loss of control if they empower employees and encounter difficulties with implementation (Forrester, 2000; Mills & Ungson, 2003). The crux of the problem is that many managers seem to think that an empowering environment has very few boundaries for employees (Jiang, Li-Yun, & Law, 2011; Melé, 2004; Tschohl, 2003). Without clear boundaries, managers are reluctant to empower employees and employees do not want to accept the responsibility of being empowered (Mills & Ungson, 2003; Randolph, 1995). The role of boundaries in empowerment needs to be better understood if the potential benefits of empowerment are to be realized.

Previous research has established a relationship between empowerment practices used by managers as contextual antecedents for an empowering environment and employees' perceived psychological empowerment (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Wilk, 2004; Seibert, Silver & Randolph, 2004; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011; Wallace et al., 2011). More recently, research has begun to examine how other variables may impact that relationship (Randolph & Kemery, 2011; Seibert et al., 2011). In this article, we extend this research into the relationship between empowerment practices and psychological empowerment in two ways. First, we confirm that when managers engage in empowerment practices, employees will feel a sense of psychological empowerment, and we delve into the subdimensions of both empowerment practices and psychological empowerment (Cho & Faerman, 2010; Seibert et al., 2004). The second, and more important contribution, is that we study the impact of preference for managerial boundary setting on managerial use of empowerment practices and on employee psychological empowerment. By studying this individual difference variable, we begin addressing the concern of managers that empowering people means creating an environment that will get out of control and deliver low performance results. If properly applied, empowerment boundaries of information sharing, clear goals and roles, and team responsibility guide employees in taking action based on their knowledge, experience, and intrinsic motivation, such that managers can be more accepting of empowerment. We believe that individual difference variables,

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such as preference for managerial boundary setting, may influence a manager's actions and the empowerment perceptions of employees.

EXTENDING AND DEEPING THE UNDERSTANDING OF EMPOWERMENT

The essence of empowerment involves tapping into employees' internal motivation and shifting decision making authority to the lowest level of an organization where competent decisions can be made (Seibert et al., 2004; Spreitzer, Kizilos & Nason, 1997). In the 1990s, researchers began developing models of empowerment that focused on antecedents, social structure characteristics, and outcomes related to empowerment practices (Koberg, Boss, Senjem, & Goodman, 1999; Spreitzer, 1995, 1996, 2008; Spreitzer et al., 1997; Thorlakson & Murray, 1996). In an early article exploring empowerment, Quinn and Spreitzer (1997) proposed a distinction in approaches to creating empowerment in organizations. The first approach they called "mechanistic," which they defined as a top-down approach to creating a context within which people will be empowered. The second approach they called "organic," which was defined as a bottom-up approach wherein managers work to understand the needs of employees and then entrust them with empowerment. They ultimately argued that the successful implementation of empowerment requires the integration of both approaches. The implication is that while managers can engage in what some researchers have come to call "structural empowerment" (e.g. Wallace et al., 2011) to create an environment that is more empowering, employees must choose to feel and act empowered—what Spreitzer defined as "psychological empowerment" (Spreitzer, 1995). Recent research has followed this lead by exploring empowerment as a process (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010) and as various managerial practices that support employee psychological empowerment (Knol & van Linge, 2009; Seibert et al., 2004; Spreitzer, 1996; Stewart, McNulty, Griffin, & Fitzpatrick, 2010). Taken together, these studies show that when managers create an environment in which employees can be empowered, employees tend to feel empowered (Seibert et al., 2011). But there remains a need to understand what other variables can either enhance or reduce this relationship (Spreitzer, 2008).

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) argued that employee feelings of empowerment consist of four subdimensions: a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Meaning concerns a similarity between an employee's values and beliefs and what is expected at work (Brief & Nord, 1990). Competence, also referred to as self-efficacy, is an employee's belief that they can complete their work effectively (Gist, 1987). Self-determination is the belief that an employee has autonomy over how work is completed (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Impact is the notion that the employee can influence organizational outcomes (Ashforth, 1989). Building on the work of Thomas and Velthouse (1990), Spreitzer (1995) developed a measure of psychological empowerment comprised of these four subdimensions. A number of researchers have utilized this framework to analyze psychological empowerment from many perspectives.

Psychological empowerment has been studied as an independent variable, a mediator, and, most often, a dependent variable. As a dependent variable, psychological empowerment has been tied to an internal locus of control, job characteristics, the superior–subordinate relationship (Jha and Nair, 2008), psychological climate (Amenumey & Lockwood, 2008), and subordinate trust (Chan, Taylor and Markham, 2008). As an independent variable, research has shown psychological empowerment to be associated with organizational commitment (Janssen, 2004) and with subordinate perceptions of being more innovative, upward influencing, and inspirational (Spreitzer, de Janasz, & Quinn, 1999). Other research found psychological empowerment to mediate the relationship between participative leadership behaviors and subordinates' task performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2010) and the effects of transformational leadership on followers' organizational commitment (Avolio, Weichun, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004). These studies are typical of the empowerment literature in that they do not address what managers do to create an empowering environment, and the lack of research with this focus has, in our opinion, contributed to the continued misperception that empowerment flows from an environment with few boundaries on employee actions (Wall, Cordery, & Clegg, 2002).

Clearly, there is a need to develop a better understanding of the role played by empowerment practices in a model of empowerment, for it is these practices that create the conditions that guide employee empowerment in a way that provides clarity of expectations for both employees and managers (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). Blanchard, Carlos, and Randolph (1995) proposed a construct of empowerment practices consisting of three subpractices. The three are (a) *sharing information* needed to make business decisions with all members of an organization, (b) *clarifying the boundaries* within which organization members can act with autonomy, and (c) *utilizing teams* to make important business decisions. At least two studies have evaluated these empowerment practices and psychological empowerment and found them to be different constructs (Cho & Faerman, 2010; Seibert et al., 2004). As Seibert et al. (2004, p. 336) explain, "Psychological empowerment refers to an individual's internal psychological state." By contrast, empowerment practices refer to the actions managers take to create an empowering work environment. In their work, Seibert et al. (2004) found a clear relationship between empowerment practices and psychological empowerment, a critical finding because it supports the fact that when managers engage in practices designed to create an empowering environment, employees will feel empowered. Their paper closed with a suggestion that future research study the role played by a work unit's manager in terms of employees' perceptions

of empowerment practices and hence of their felt sense of empowerment.

Following this lead, Randolph and Kemery (2011) studied the role played by managerial power bases (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1993) in the relationship between managerial empowerment practices and employees' felt sense of psychological empowerment. They found that managerial empowerment practices were related to the employees' sense of psychological empowerment, supporting the earlier research by Seibert et al., (2004), but the new contribution from their research was the finding that employee perceptions of the manager's use of power bases fully mediated this relationship. Their findings suggest that the role played by the manager–employee relationship needs to be integrated into any complete model of empowerment, and they argued that future research must also consider aspects of individual differences in the model, as well.

As early as 2000, practitioner-focused articles pointed to the importance of understanding individual characteristics and needs that might inhibit successful empowerment in organizations (Forrester, 2000; Randolph, 2000). More recently, Spreitzer (2008) noted the need for more research into how individual dispositions influence empowerment. To date, research that has been conducted has focused exclusively on the role played by individual characteristics in impacting employee psychological empowerment and ignored their impact on managerial empowerment practices (Seibert et al., 2011). Spreitzer (1995) found that high-self-esteem individuals had greater feelings of psychological empowerment. Hon and Rensvold (2006) studied individual need for achievement and need for power as predictors of perceived empowerment. Cho and Faerman (2010) found that collectivism moderates the relationship between psychological empowerment and performance. Gomez and Rosen (2001) found that manager–employee relationships in the form of managerial trust impact employee-perceived empowerment. Ahearne, Mathieu, and Rapp (2005) focused on the role that employee readiness for empowerment plays in the relationship between leadership empowerment behaviors and customer satisfaction and performance. Finally, Kark, Shamir, and Chen (2003) found that social identification mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and followers' empowerment. These studies are a start, but more research is needed to understand the role played by individual differences of both managers and employees in a theory of empowerment.

Furthermore, and as previously noted, these studies previous studies have focused only on psychological empowerment. We were unable to identify any studies that examine the effect that individual differences have on either managerial empowerment practices or the relationship between managerial empowerment practices and employee psychological empowerment. This aspect of individual differences needs to be further examined if we are to develop a more complete model of how empowerment works in organizations. Since employee empowerment involves pushing decisions to the lowest organizational level where competent decisions can be made, both employees and managers must have a comfort level with this shift in responsibility. As Mills and Ungson (2003) argue, empowerment creates a situation in which managers may fear losing control, resulting in decreased organizational success. As they put it, "How does the firm continue to control and coordinate as it continues to empower employees?" (Mills & Ungson, 2003, p. 146). Real empowerment depends on employees having autonomy to act but within the clarity of certain boundaries that serve as guidelines. Indeed, "many false starts toward empowerment involve too little structure" (Randolph, 1995, p. 25). Empowerment does not mean managers losing control; rather, it means a shifting of responsibility for goal accomplishment to employees within defined parameters.

Mills and Ungson (2003) discuss mechanisms for establishing this empowered control, such as the utilization of agreements and understandings that define the limits, goals, and responsibilities of employees who are empowered to make decisions and take action. Their argument is quite consistent with the one offered by Randolph (1995) in explaining a key paradox of empowerment. Essentially, Randolph argues that there is a need for setting boundaries through definition of goals and responsibility if employees are to act empowered. Without such clear expectations to guide the actions of employees, managers are likely to fear a loss of control and employees are less likely to take action (Randolph, 2000). What this leads us to conclude is that managers must be comfortable providing clear boundaries through the use of managerial empowerment practices.

Likewise, an employee must be comfortable working in an environment where information sharing, clarity of goals, and definition of team responsibilities are provided to guide increased decision-making responsibility and greater accountability. Thus, employees' desire for managerial boundary setting, in conjunction with their manager's desire for managerial boundary setting, may very well play an important role in the process of creating employee psychological empowerment. For managerial empowerment practices to be effective, employees must be inclined toward accepting them; that is, managerial empowerment practices are likely to create employee psychological empowerment to the degree that employees prefer managerial boundary setting.

As noted in Spreizter et al. (1997), a unidimensional representation of psychological empowerment contains four distinct subfactors. By including only their aggregation as a single variable representing psychological empowerment, researchers are unable to identify effects of specific subfactors that would advance empowerment theory. This same argument also applies to managerial empowerment practices. Although it stands to reason that the three subfactors of managerial empowerment practices might relate differentially to psychological empowerment factors, the dearth of research and theory surrounding them does not suggest a framework for making predictions about their interrelationships. Following Spreitzer

et al. (1997), differential predictions are not made a priori. Rather, any significant findings that emerge are addressed in our discussion section.

HYPOTHESES

The research demonstrating that managerial empowerment practices create an empowering environment wherein employees feel a sense of psychological empowerment needs to be expanded (Seibert et al., 2004). Randolph and Kemery (2011) posit that beliefs or attitudes of both managers and employees may affect this relationship. For empowerment to work, managers must be comfortable with defining boundaries if they are to create an empowering environment, and employees also must be comfortable with managerial boundary setting in order to take on more decision-making responsibility and to accept accountability for the results of those decisions.

We would argue that managers with a preference for managerial boundary setting will be more comfortable with defining boundaries and hence more likely to engage in these structuring behaviors than others (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997; Randolph, 1995). This desire for managerial boundary setting will lead them to engage more readily in empowerment practices that provide boundaries which can act as guidelines for employee actions. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Managers with greater preference for managerial boundary setting are more likely to engage in empowerment practices, overall and on the three subpractices, than those with lesser preference for managerial boundary setting.

However, we believe this positive relationship will hold only up to a point. Managers with an extreme preference for managerial boundary setting may feel comfortable with creating and living with boundaries for employees, but they will be less inclined to push decision making to the lowest level of the organization, because they will reach a point at which they feel they are not in control of the environment. Thus, we expect the relationship between empowerment practices and preference for managerial boundary setting to be an inverted U shape: low empowerment practices among managers with lower preference, high empowerment practices among managers with moderate preference, and then low again among managers with higher preference. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b: The degree of managers' preference for managerial boundary setting will differentially affect their use of empowerment practices, overall and on the three subpractices, such that the relationship between empowerment practices and preference for managerial boundary setting is in the form of an inverted U shape.

Following from Hypothesis 1, just as managers must have a comfort level with operating in an empowering environment, so too must employees if they are to take on the responsibility associated with being empowered. Moving from a more traditional hierarchical organization to one of empowerment is a big step for most employees. Employees will tend to fear failure, be afraid of responsibility, and feel they lack skills needed to be empowered (Randolph, 2000). Hence, an environment with defined boundaries for action can be of great value to help employees act in an empowered manner, but some employees may welcome such definition of boundaries more than others. Some studies have reported findings relating employee characteristics and beliefs to psychological empowerment—namely, age and education (Kahnweiler & Thompson, 2000), subordinate trust (Chan et al., 2008), follower dependency (Divir & Shamir, 2001; Kark et al., 2003), and individualism (Cho & Faerman, 2010; Hon & Rensvold, 2006).

However, we are unaware of any literature linking the key variable in this study—preferences for managerial boundary setting—with perceptions of psychological empowerment. Based on the same logic applied earlier for managers, we predict that employees who have a higher preference for managerial boundary setting will be more likely to be receptive to their managers' empowerment practices, because such practices define the boundaries these employees desire. Thus, we expect that employees with preference for managerial boundary setting be more likely to perceive their workplace as empowering. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a: Employees with greater preference for managerial boundary setting are more likely to have a strong sense of psychological empowerment, overall and on the four dimensions, than employees with lesser preference for managerial boundary setting.

However, as with managers, we believe this positive relationship will hold only up to a point. Employees with an extreme preference for managerial boundary setting may feel comfortable living with structure, but they will be less inclined to fully accept the responsibility of decision making that goes along with being empowered. They will reach a point at which they are being asked to take on more responsibility than they feel comfortable handling. Thus, we expect the relationship between psychological empowerment and employee preference for managerial boundary setting to be an inverted U shape: low psychological empowerment among employees with lesser preference for managerial boundary setting, high psychological empowerment among employees with moderate preference, and then low again among employees with high preference. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2b: The degree of employee preference for managerial boundary setting will differentially affect their perceptions of psychological empowerment, overall and on the four subdimensions, such that the relationship takes the form of an inverted U.

Previous research has documented a significant relationship between empowerment practices and psychological empowerment (Randolph & Kemery, 2011; Seibert et al., 2004). The logic for this relationship is straightforward and found in the conceptual linkages between facets of empowerment practices and employee empowerment. Manager empowerment practices consist of information sharing, autonomy through boundaries, and team accountability. Employee psychological empowerment consists of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Information sharing by managers involves providing operational information and performance feedback with employees, which results in them having a greater understanding of job requirements and using their individual talents (i.e., competence) to get the job done (Bandura, 1982; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Additionally, when managers create a clear vision with well-defined goals (i.e., autonomy through boundaries), they are engaging in activities that will create a bounded environment within which employees will exercise self-determination, which is likely to increase employee psychological empowerment (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Locke & Latham, 1990). Finally, the team accountability aspect of empowerment practices involves delegating responsibility for outcomes to work group members. This should enhance employee empowerment by increasing employees' joint control of the work environment (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Liden & Tewksbury, 1995; Seibert et al., 2004). Thus, we expect that managers' empowerment practices should result in their employees experiencing a felt sense of psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 3a: Managerial empowerment practices and employee psychological empowerment are positively related.

It is, however, interesting to consider whether an employee's preference for managerial boundary setting may impact the relationship between managerial empowerment practices and employee psychological empowerment. If an employee has a higher (lower) preference for managerial boundary setting, it may be that the employee will respond to the manager use of empowerment practices with a greater (lesser) perception of psychological empowerment. Thus, we expect to find that employee preference for managerial boundary setting will moderate the relationship between manager empowerment practices and employee perceptions of psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis 3b: Employee preference for managerial boundary setting will moderate the relationship between managerial empowerment practices and employee psychological empowerment such that greater preference for managerial boundary setting will strengthen the relationship.

Our proposed research model is shown in Figure 1.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Study data were collected from manager–subordinate dyads. The subordinates were full-time employees in their companies, who attend undergraduate classes part-time at a regional, public university in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. All respondents volunteered for the study and were assured confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were supplied with research packets consisting of a cover letter,

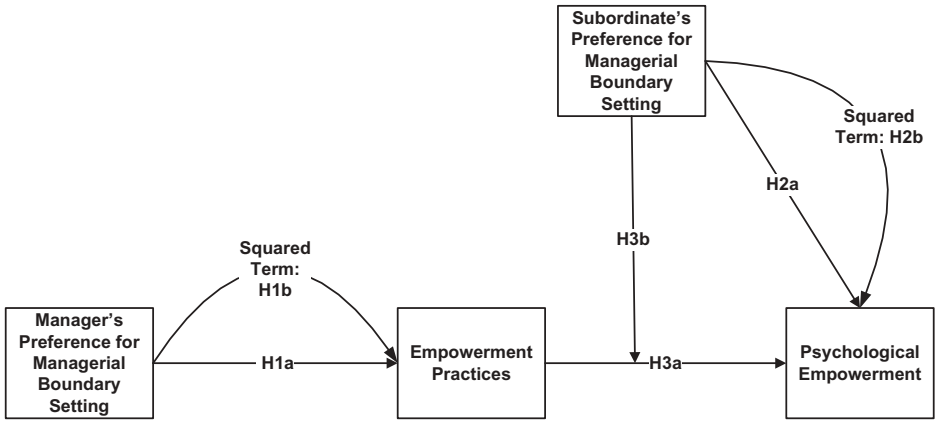

FIG. 1. Exploratory research model relating preference for managerial boundary setting, managers' empowerment practices, and employee psychological empowerment.

two color-coded questionnaires (one for the subordinate and one for the supervisor), and return envelopes. The questionnaires were numbered for matching purposes. The subordinates were instructed to give their immediate supervisors the green questionnaire and to complete the white one themselves. Questionnaires were returned to the researchers in sealed envelopes. The manager questionnaire assessed practices they use to create an empowering environment for their subordinates and their preference for managerial boundary setting, while employee questionnaires assessed their felt sense of psychological empowerment and their preference for managerial boundary setting. Approximately 62% of the participants returned completed questionnaires providing usable data for 167 manager–employee pairs.

More managers (52%) were male than their subordinates (35%). Most managers (74%) and subordinates (57%) indicated their race as Caucasian. For both managers (M) and subordinates (S), this was followed by African-American (M: 20%. S: 33%), Asian (M: 4%, S: 7%), and Latino (M: 2%, S: 3%). Managers tended to be older ($M = 41.0$ years, $SD = 11.0$) than their subordinates ($M = 29.2$ years, $SD = 9.1$), and have longer tenure in their current positions ($M = 8.8$ years, $SD = 8.5$) than their subordinates ($M = 4.8$ years, $SD = 6.1$). The age and tenure data of the employees in this study reflect a level of work experience not found in the typical undergraduate student population.

Measures

Psychological empowerment. Employees' perceptions of their psychological empowerment were assessed with Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item psychological empowerment scale. This measure is comprised of four subscales: *meaning* (e.g., "The work I do is very important to me"), *competence* (e.g., "I am confident about my ability to do my job"), *self-determination* (e.g., "I have considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my job"), and *impact* (e.g. "I have significant influence over what happens in my department"). Our measures were created by averaging the three items in each subscale. The alpha reliability coefficients for these four submeasures of psychological empowerment were .85 (competence), .88 (self-determination), .89 (impact), and .92 (meaning). Also, following Spreitzer (1995, 1996), we included an overall measure of *psychological empowerment* by averaging all 12 items ($\alpha = .84$).

Managerial empowerment practices. Managers completed the empowerment practices measure designed to assess managerial use of empowerment practices (Blanchard et al., 1995). The 30 items covered three dimensions of organizational empowerment: *information sharing* (e.g., "We put information in the hands of frontline people so that they can make responsible decisions"), *autonomy through boundaries* (e.g., "We create structures and procedures that encourage and expect people to take initiative in improving organizational performance"), and *team accountability* (e.g., "In our organization, teams now make many of the decisions that management used to make"). Each dimension contained 10 items with six possible response options per item (1 = *almost never,* 6 = *almost always*). Higher scores reflected higher levels of empowerment. By averaging the items in each scale, we created four measures of empowerment practices: the three dimensions of organizational empowerment and, following Seibert et al. (2004), an overall measure of *empowerment practices*. The alpha reliability coefficients for the scales were .89 (information sharing), .93 (team accountability), .94 (boundary setting), and .96 (empowerment practices).

Previous studies have analyzed the factor structure of the empowerment practices and psychological empowerment measures used in this study (Randolph & Kemery, 2011; Seibert et al., 2004). These studies have confirmed through factor analysis the three subscales of empowerment practices and the four subscales of psychological empowerment, but to date there have only been two studies that utilized the subscales of psychological empowerment. Wang and Lee (2009) utilized the subscales in their study of the interactive effects of psychological empowerment on job satisfaction, and Dewettinck and van Ameijde (2011) tested the mediating role of psychological empowerment on the relationship between leader empowerment behavior and job satisfaction and affective commitment, using the subdimensions of the construct. There have been no studies that utilized the subdimensions of empowerment practices. Hence, in our results we not only report on the overall measure, but we also report results for the subscales of both empowerment practices and psychological empowerment.

Preference for managerial boundary setting. Both employees and managers completed Veiga and Yanouzas's (1979) Organizational Preference Inventory. This instrument contains 16 items that assess the level of preference for managerial boundary setting. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) with each item, "as it describes the type of organization you prefer to work in." Sample items include "there are established rules of authority and responsibility" and "people accept the authority and the position of the leader." Higher responses indicate a greater preference for managerial boundary setting, while lower responses indicate a lesser preference for managerial boundary setting. Separate factor analyses of manager and subordinate responses supported a one-factor solution. Using principal axis factoring, explained variance was 29.79% and 30.01% for the manager and subordinate samples, respectively. Every item loaded in the expected direction, with loadings ranging from 0.35 to 0.72 for managers, and from 0.40 to 0.72 for subordinates. Preference for managerial boundary setting was computed by averaging responses to the 16 items. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for this measure were .86 in the managers sample and .87 in the subordinates sample.

Other variables. All respondents provided basic demographic information including sex, age, race, and job tenure. Sex

(1 = male, 0 = female) and race (1 = White, 0 = non-White) were coded as dichotomous variables. Age and job tenure were continuous variables measured in years at the time of data collection. Descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables used in our analyses are shown in Table 1.

RESULTS

All hypotheses were tested with hierarchical regressions.[1] Age, sex, and race were entered as controls in the first step. This was followed by the independent variables in step 2 and the polynomial and interaction terms in step 3. Our findings for the overall dimensions of empowerment practices and psychological empowerment can be found in Figure 2.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b examined the relationship between manager preference for managerial boundary setting and manager use of empowerment practices. Hypothesis 1a predicted that managers with greater preference for managerial boundary setting would be more likely to engage in the three empowerment practices than managers with lesser preference for managerial boundary setting. The results for the models testing this hypothesis can be found in Model 1 of Table 2. Each empowerment practice model was significant, as were the positive coefficients for manager preference for managerial boundary setting, indicating full support of this hypothesis. In the overall ($\beta = .42, p < .001$), information sharing ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$), autonomy ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), and team accountability ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) models, managers with a greater preference for managerial boundary setting were more likely to engage in the three empowerment practices than managers with lesser preference for managerial boundary setting.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that the relationship between managers' preference for managerial boundary setting and their empowerment practices would take the form of an inverted U. This was tested by including a quadratic term in the model. The results of this analysis can be found in the columns marked Model 2 (Table 2). The coefficient for the square of the managers' preference term was significant in the overall ($\beta = 1.14$, $p < .01$), autonomy ($\beta = 1.36$, $p < .01$), and team accountability ($\beta = .94$, $p < .05$) models, but not in the information sharing model. However, the shape of the curve was not as we predicted. As depicted in Figure 3, a graph of the overall model indicates the shape is a flattened U, with the greatest number of empowerment practices coming from managers that had the greatest preference for managerial boundary setting. Thus, there was support for a nonlinear relationship, but not in the shape predicted by Hypothesis 1b.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b examined the relationship between employee preference for managerial boundary setting and their perceptions of psychological empowerment. In Hypothesis 2a, we predicted that greater employee preference for managerial boundary setting would be associated with higher perceptions of psychological empowerment on its four subdimensions, while lesser employee preference for managerial boundary setting would be associated with lower perceptions of psychological empowerment. The models and positive coefficients on subordinate preferences (see Model 1, Tables 3 and 4) were significant for overall psychological empowerment ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) and for three of the four subscales: meaning ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), competence ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), and self-determination ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$). Impact was not significant. As predicted, subordinates with greater preference for managerial boundary setting were more likely to hold high perceptions of psychological empowerment than those with lesser preference for managerial boundary setting. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported in the overall measure of psychological empowerment and supported in three of the four subscales.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that the relationship between employee preference for managerial boundary setting and psychological empowerment would take the shape of an inverted U. The results for this can be found in the quadratic term (Subordinate preference for managerial boundary setting squared) in Model 2 of Tables 3 and 4. While all except for the impact model were negative as predicted, they did not achieve significance, and thus Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that managers' empowerment practices are positively associated with employees' psychological empowerment perceptions.[2] Our findings can be found in the columns labeled Model 1 in Tables 3 and 4. The results indicate this hypothesis was supported in the overall model ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) and the subdimension of meaning ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). However, managers' empowerment practices were not significantly related to employee perceptions in the competence, self-determination, and impact models. Thus, there was only partial support for Hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 3b predicted a moderation effect of employee preference for managerial boundary setting that strengthens the relationship between manager use of empowerment practices and employee perception of psychological empowerment. These results can be found in Model 2 of Tables 3 and 4. The coefficient for subordinate preference for managerial boundary setting–management empowerment practices interaction term was not significant for the overall, meaning, self-determination, and impact models. However, for the competence model, this term ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$) was significant and supports this hypothesis. Figure 4 depicts the results of this interaction by plotting predicted psychological empowerment for respondents one standard deviation above and below the sample mean on subordinate preference for managerial boundary setting and empowerment practices and on the sample mean for all other variables. This figure shows that at higher levels, greater preferences for managerial boundary setting by employees resulted in higher levels of psychological empowerment when managerial empowerment practices were high than when preferences for managerial boundary setting were low. Taken together, these results provide tentative support for H3b. We view these results as tentative owing

TABLE 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlations

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Manager variables												
1	Sex	.52	.50									
2	Age	41.00	10.97	.03								
3	Race	.74	.44	−.01	.14							
4	Empowerment practices	4.06	.87	.01	−.01	.01	*.96*					
5	Information sharing	4.14	.86	.09	−.01	.03	.87***	*.89*				
6	Autonomy through boundaries	4.17	.99	−.02	−.00	−.00	.92***	.76***	*.94*			
7	Team accountability	3.87	1.05	.00	−.02	.04	.89***	.63***	.72***	*.93*		
8	Pref. mgr. boundary setting	3.91	.56	.11	−.06	−.03	.42***	.40***	.46***	.29***	*.86*	
Subordinate variables												
9	Sex	.35	.48	.23**	−.00	.04	−.02	.04	−.05	−.05	.14	
10	Age	29.15	9.12	.03	.31***	−.04	−.04	−.02	.01	.11	.12	.06
11	Race	.58	.50	.08	−.06	.42***	−.01	−.01	.01	.01	.19*	.21**
12	Psychological empowerment	3.87	.59	.16*	.05	−.17*	.21**	.22**	.16**	.21**	.23**	−.05
13	Meaning	3.83	.90	.02	.17*	−.10	.19*	.18*	.18**	.18**	.14	−.16*
14	Competence	4.44	.63	.19*	−.03	−.07	−.02	.08	−.00	−.03	.29***	.04
15	Self-determination	3.87	.92	.10	−.02	−.12	.12	.11	.06	.16*	.09	−.05
16	Impact	3.32	1.03	.15*	−.02	−.16*	.20*	.21**	.16**	.19**	.15	.04
17	Pref. mgr. boundary setting	3.83	.54	−.08	−.14	−.05	.06	.07	.03	.06	.31***	−.07

(Continued)

TABLE 1
(Continued)

	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11	−.23**							
12	.06	.05	*.84*					
13	−.12	−.13	.64***	*.92*				
14	.14	.13	.47***	.07	*.85*			
15	.04	.03	.79***	.34***	.29***	*.88*		
16	.13	.11	.73***	.23**	.14	.43***	*.89*	
17	.04	.03	.35***	.24**	.34***	.35***	.06	*.87*

Note. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients are the italicized numbers on the diagonals. Pref. mgr. boundary setting, preference for managerial boundary setting.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

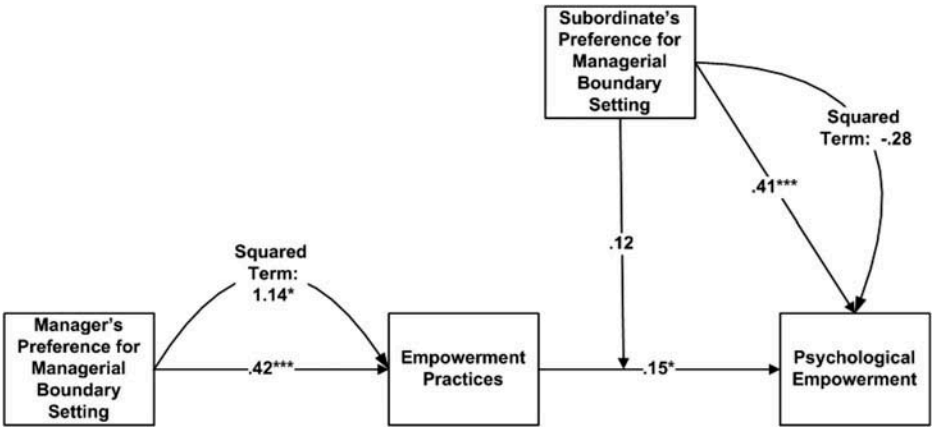

FIG. 2. Exploratory research model results relating preference for managerial boundary setting, managers' empowerment practices, and employee psychological empowerment. Significant differences: $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$. The number between the boxes for manager and subordinate preferences for managerial boundary setting is the zero-order correlation. The remaining numbers are the parameter estimates and standard errors (in parentheses) from the overall hierarchical linear models.

TABLE 2
Standardized regression coefficients predicting empowerment practices

		Empowerment practices final βs							
		Overall		Information sharing		Autonomy through boundaries		Team accountability	
Step		Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
1	Sex	−.03	−.03	.04	.04	−.06	−.06	−.02	−.03
	Age	.01	−.01	.01	−.00	.02	.01	−.01	−.02
	Race	−.02	−.02	−.04	−.04	−.01	−.01	−.03	−.03
2	Mgr. pref. for mgr. boundary setting	.42***	−.75	.39***	−.26	.46***	−.88*	.29***	−.64
3	Mgr. pref. for mgr. boundary setting squared		1.14*		.65		1.36**		.94*
	Overall model F	8.14***	8.09***	7.65***	6.59***	10.62***	11.10***	3.53**	3.69**
	Change in R^2 at Step 2	.17***	.17***	.15***	.15***	.21***	.21***	.08***	.08***
	Change in R^2 at Step 3		.03*		.01		.05**		.02*
	Adjusted R^2	.15	.18	.14	.15	.19	.24	.06	.08

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

to the exploratory nature of our study and that conducting analyses of correlated subfactors increase a potential for Type I error.[3]

DISCUSSION

The purpose of our study was to begin exploring individual difference variables in a model of empowerment that focuses on the empowerment practices that managers use to create an empowering environment and the psychological empowerment that employees feel. We examined the role of manager and employee preferences for managerial boundary setting, as it impacts managers' use of empowerment practices and employee perceptions of psychological empowerment. We found that manager preference for managerial boundary setting was positively related to the degree to which managers utilize empowerment practices (overall measure and the three subscales). However, the nature of the relationship was nonlinear. When manager preference for managerial boundary setting was low, there was a slight tendency for managers to engage in empowerment practices. However, managers with at least a moderate preference for managerial boundary setting demonstrated an increasing propensity to engage in empowerment practices. This nonlinear relationship held for the

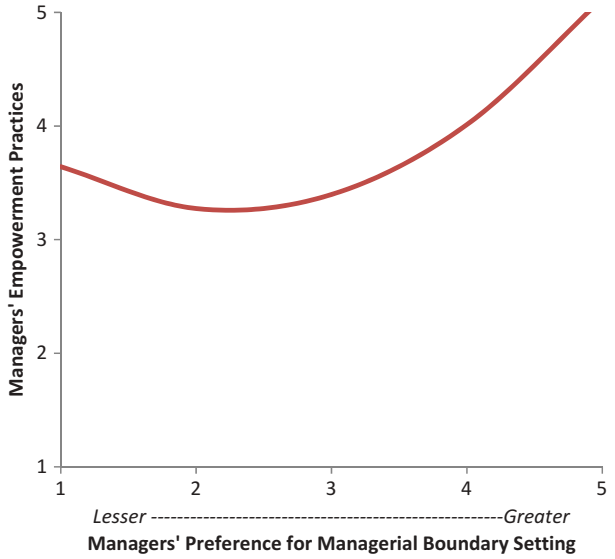

FIG. 3. Relationship between manager preference for managerial boundary setting and empowerment practices.

TABLE 3
Standardized regression coefficients predicting psychological empowerment

		Psychological empowerment final βs	
Step		Model 1	Model 2
1	Sex	−.03	−.04
	Age	.01	.06
	Race	−.06	−.06
2	Sub. pref. for mgr. boundary setting	.41***	.70
	Mgr's empowerment practices	.15*	.16*
3	Sub. pref. for mgr. boundary setting squared		−.28
	Sub. pref. for mgr. boundary setting × Mgr's empowerment practices		.12
	Overall model F	7.28***	5.66***
	Change in R^2 at Step 2	.18***	.18***
	Change in R^2 at Step 3		.02
	Adjusted R^2	.17	.17

Note. Mgr., manager; sub., subordinate.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

overall measure of empowerment practices, autonomy through boundaries, and team accountability models, but not for the information sharing model. These findings suggest that the relationship between manager preference for managerial boundary setting and their use of the three empowerment practices is somewhat complex, and it is interesting to note that use of empowerment practices is highest for managers with a greater preference for managerial boundary setting.

These findings add clarity to the role played by boundaries in a model of empowerment. For people to be empowered, they need information, a clear vision with well-defined goals and roles, and team-based responsibility for results. Once these boundaries are clear, employees understand in which areas they can exercise autonomy and influence (Seibert et al., 2004). It stands to reason that managers who prefer greater managerial boundary setting will be better able to create the boundaries within which employees can feel and act empowered. We can speculate that these managers feel more in control of the situation when employees have a clear understanding of expectations and can act to achieve the goals the manager has defined. In practice, managers with a lesser preference for managerial boundary setting need to be aware of how this may inhibit their effectiveness leading empowerment efforts. Furthermore, organizations that want to develop and foster an empowering environment may want to consider assessing managerial candidates' preference for managerial boundary setting to better inform a selection process that can foster empowerment.

We also found that employee preference for managerial boundary setting was positively related to their perceptions of psychological empowerment. This relationship held for overall psychological empowerment and the subdimensions of meaning, competence, and self-determination, but not for impact. It would appear that the same preference for managerial boundary setting that is associated with empowerment practices of managers is connected with employee feelings of psychological empowerment. Employees too like the definition of boundaries if they are going to take on the risk of being empowered. It is within these defined boundaries that employees can utilize their knowledge, experience, and intrinsic motivation to act with autonomy in how they pursue their goals, that is, to act empowered. Hence, it stands to reason that a preference for managerial boundary setting will be consistent with the role of boundaries in creating successful empowerment.

As other studies have found, when managers utilize empowerment practices, employees feel a sense of psychological empowerment. However, in delving into the subdimensions of psychological empowerment, only meaning was significantly related to the manager's utilization of empowerment practices. Perhaps meaning is the core element in psychological empowerment, which is consistent with Spreitzer et al. (1997), who opined that meaning is the "engine" of empowerment (p. 681). Certainly, more research is called for

TABLE 4
Standardized regression coefficients predicting employee psychological empowerment dimensions

		Psychological empowerment dimensions final βs							
		Meaning		Competence		Self-determination		Impact	
Step		Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
1	Sex	−.11	−.12	.05	.03	−.05	−.06	.04	.04
	Age	.20**	.21**	.05	.06	−.00	−.00	−.07	−.08
	Race	.07	.07	−.06	−.07	−.01	−.02	−.13	−.13
2	Sub. pref for managerial boundary setting	.34***	.79	.30***	.80	.35***	.51	.15	−.02
	Mgr's empowerment practices	.17*	.17*	−.03	−.02	.10	.11	.12	.13
3	Sub. pref bound setting squared		−.46		−.48		−.14		.17
	Sub. pref bound setting × Mgr's empowerment practices		−.01		.17*		.14		.05
	Overall model F	7.12***	5.17***	2.85*	2.98**	5.16***	4.22***	2.32*	1.72
	Change in R^2 at Step 2	.14***	.14***	.08**	.08**	.13**	.13**	.04*	.04*
	Change in R^2 at Step 3		.01		.04*	.02			.00
	Adjusted R^2	.16	.16	.06	.08	.12	.12	.04	.03

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

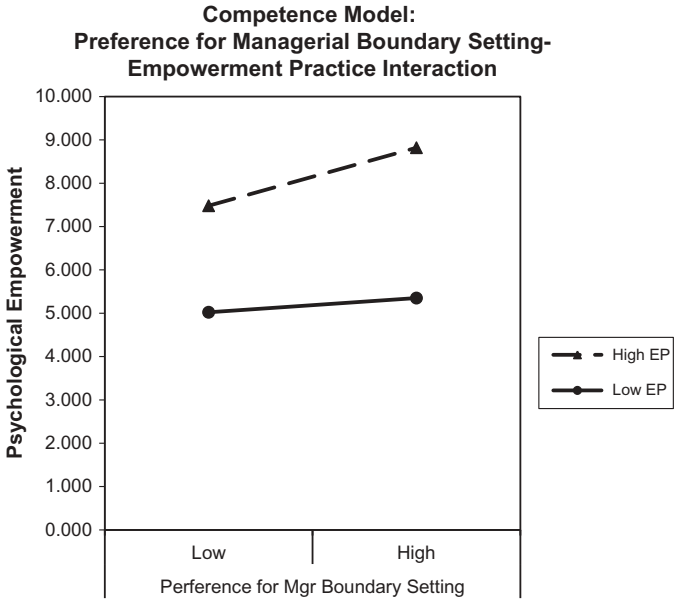

FIG. 4. Competence model: interaction plot of subordinate preference for manager boundary setting, and manager empowerment practices.

to better understand how the subdimensions of psychological empowerment relate to empowerment practices, and indeed, to the subdimensions of information sharing, creating clear boundaries, and team accountability.

Finally, we found that employee preference for managerial boundary setting did not moderate the relationship between manager use of empowerment practices and employee perception of psychological empowerment, with the exception of the competence subdimension of psychological empowerment. In one sense this is good news for managers who want to create feelings of empowerment. Their efforts will not be diluted if there is a lack of employee preference for managerial boundary setting, at least not directly. However, if, as we found in this study, manager preference for boundary setting makes the manager more likely to engage in empowerment practices, and if employee preference for boundary setting makes the employee more likely to perceive psychological empowerment, there may be a less direct impact to be uncovered.

Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Our study contains several methodological limitations. One is that our data are cross-sectional, which does not allow for causal inference between preferences for managerial boundary setting, empowerment practices, and psychological empowerment. Future research is needed to explore these relationships with longitudinal data. Another potential limitation is that there is little empirical validation for the organizational preference inventory we used. However, its factor structure was confirmed, and internal consistency reliabilities are high, and the significant manager–subordinate dyadic correlation we observed came from different sources. Taken together, these

results provide some evidence for the measure's psychometric quality.

Another potential limitation is that all our measures came from questionnaires, which could produce common method bias. However, while common method bias might influence findings from the same source (e.g., managers or subordinates), it is considered less of a threat to results obtained from between sources, such as managers' reports of empowerment practices and employee perceptions of psychological empowerment (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2011). Furthermore, common method variance is believed less likely when testing nonlinear hypotheses such as our quadratic predictions (Harrison, McLaughlin, & Coalter, 1996). This is because one possible source of common method variance is when respondents are influenced by their implicit theory (i.e., their cognitive map) of what is being measured. It is unlikely that complex, theoretically based research hypotheses are influenced by research subjects' cognitive maps (Harrison et al., 1996) and thus are less susceptible to common method variance. Recent research by Siemsen, Roth, and Oliveira (2010) confirmed this point, as they found that higher order effects such as interactions and quadratic are not due to common method variance.

Our study raises several implications and questions for future research. In order to better understand the role of preference for managerial boundary setting in creating an empowering environment, longitudinal research is needed. Understanding temporal effects of preference for managerial boundary setting and empowerment aspects, including their susceptibility to contextual influence, would be extremely beneficial for theory building. For example, if, as is suggested by our study, preference for managerial boundary setting is important for understanding the development of an empowering environment, then, over time, increasing degrees of preference homogeneity between managers and employees would be expected. Alternatively, findings from our study are consistent too with a dyadic notion of empowerment. That is, because our data were obtained from manager–subordinate pairs, our results could be interpreted to mean that a manager's use of empowerment practices may need to vary depending on characteristics of particular employees. Additionally, future research should explore the causal nexus of empowerment, focusing on subdimensions of empowerment practices, psychological empowerment, and their interrelationships. For example, if, as suggested by Spreitzer et al. (1997) and supported by our findings, meaning is the driver of psychological empowerment, future research should test models in which meaning is positioned as a precursor to the other psychological empowerment subfactors. These questions and others can be addressed by comparing goodness of fit of competing structural models.

We also found a positive correlation between managers' and subordinates' preference for boundary setting. This observed similarity may provide a fruitful avenue for future research. It is possible that over time, manager and subordinate similarity develops through a process such as attraction–selection–attrition in which employees remain in organization contexts that match their values (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995).

In sum, our research shows that individual preferences for managerial boundary setting by managers are related to their use of managerial empowerment practices that lead to an empowered workplace. Preferences for managerial boundary setting by employees are related to employee perceptions of psychological empowerment. In addition, while employee preference for managerial boundary setting did not have the moderating impact we predicted, the finding that manager and employee preference for managerial boundary setting are related suggests that preference for managerial boundary setting may ultimately impact the empowerment climate in an organization in less direct ways—that is, by impacting both manager practices and employee perceptions that are related to enhanced empowerment in an organization. Thus, our study contributes to the development of an understanding of the role of boundary setting in a theory of empowerment, as well as the need to include individual difference variables in any complete model of the empowerment process. The expanding body of research on empowerment suggests that creating empowerment in organizations and achieving results may be far more complex than previously thought. Clearly, there is a need for continued research into this important topic.

NOTES

1. Following Kenny, Kashey, and Cook's (2006) recommendation to test dyadic data with multilevel modeling, we repeated the analysis using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM). HLM is preferred to ordinary least-squares regression because HLM simultaneously accounts for variances and covariances both within and between groups (Raudenbush & Byrk, 2002). Dyadic data are a special case of hierarchically nested data, and as such can be modeled with HLM (Kenny et al., 2006). Normally in HLM, within-group differences are shown by differences in both intercepts and slopes. However, for dyadic data, models must be constrained to include only the fixed effects at the lower (subordinate) level because dyads do not contain enough members to allow random effects across dyads. Constraining the model in this way allows member scores within dyads to be modeled via the intercepts only. This method does not bias the estimates, and thus allows for the use of HLM with dyadic data (Kenny et al., 2006).

2. This hypothesis involves a partial replication of a hypothesis from a previous study using the same data (Randolph & Kemery, 2011). However, there are two important differences between the analyses. First, the previous study's analysis was merely correlational, while this study employs a multivariate technique. Second, the previous test for this hypothesis examined only the overall measure of psychological empowerment, while this study examines both the overall measure and the four subdimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) of psychological empowerment.

3. We gratefully acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

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