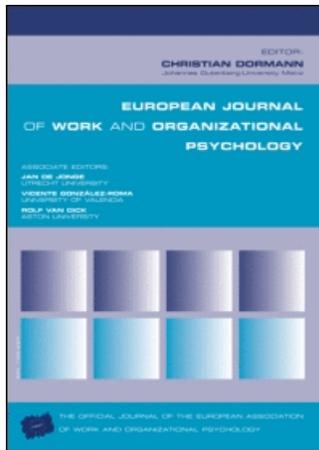


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## **The moderator effect of psychological climate on the relationship between leader–member exchange (LMX) quality and role overload**

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The aim of the present study was to analyse the moderator influence of psychological climate on the relationship between leader–member exchange (LMX) quality and role overload. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in a sample of 383 employees. Results showed that LMX quality was negatively related to role overload and that three out of the four climate dimensions considered moderated the LMX–role overload relationship. This relationship was stronger when innovation climate, goals orientation, and rules orientation were high than when these climate dimensions were low.

Leadership is an important factor in the explanation of the occupational health of workers (Nyberg, Bernin, & Theorell, 2005). Leaders can have an impact on several sources of stress, which in turn will affect employees' strain and well-being (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling, 2004). They can increase stressful organizational conditions by sending excessive demands to employees or by stimulating perceptions of injustice with their decisions. Thus, ineffective leadership can seriously contribute to damaging

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employees' health and well-being. On the contrary, effective leadership is a key factor for healthy organizations and a healthy workforce.

There is strong agreement in the literature in favour of considering role stressors as one of the main categories of organizational stressors (Kahn & Byosiére, 1990; Sonnentag & Frese, 2003), and research has found this type of stressor to be related to a large number of strains and work outcomes, such as tension, satisfaction, and propensity to leave (e.g., Glazer & Beehr, 2005; House & Rizzo, 1972; Kahn & Byosiére, 1990; Peiró, González-Romá, & Lloret, 1994; Peiró, González-Romá, Tordera, & Mañas, 2001; Peterson et al., 1995). Role stressors evolve in the context of a role-definition process in which both the role incumbent and his/her role senders (such as his/her leader, workmates, and customers) receive and send demands and expectations about a given role (Graen, 1976; Peiró & González-Romá, 1991; Peiró, Meliá, & Zurriaga, 1990). These expectations and demands will define the behaviours that are ascribed to the role (Ortqvist & Vincent, 2006).

There are three main types of role stressors: role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload (Kahn & Byosiére, 1990). Role overload has been identified as one of the most serious and rapidly increasing problems in many work environments in Europe (Paoli & Merlié, 2005), USA (Murphy & Sauter, 2003), and in Western countries in general (World Health Organization, 2000). Role overload is the employee's perception that the work demands s/he receives surpass, quantitatively or qualitatively, his/her resources (Peterson et al., 1995). It has been related to other potential stressors, such as disruptions in social and family life, and a strong linkage has been established between the degree of intensity of work (i.e., very high speed, tight deadlines, not enough time to do the job) and reported health problems and absence due to accidents (Weiler, 2005). Because leaders are one of the most important agents for role definition, it is plausible to expect that they exert a critical influence on the perception of role stressors such as role overload (Kelloway et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 1995).

Leader-member exchange theory has evolved in the past few years as one of the most useful approaches for studying hypothesized links between leadership and organizational outcomes (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). This theoretical framework, based on role theory, considers that leaders develop different kinds of relationships with each of their subordinates. In this sense, leadership is considered the result of a role-making process through which leader and subordinates define the quality of their dyadic relation (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989; Yukl, 1994). Subordinates in high-quality relationships receive higher levels of resources, trust, and emotional support from their leaders (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000). On the contrary, low-quality relationships are characterized by lower levels of negotiating

latitude, trust, and social support. Taking into account that LMX quality refers to an interaction process through which leaders exert demands and give resources to workers, it is plausible to expect that LMX quality and employee overload will be related.

Different theoretical frameworks in leadership research, especially contingent theories, have emphasized the importance of contextual factors in leadership processes (Bass, 1990; Peiró, González-Romá, & Ramos, 1992; Yukl, 1994). This aspect has also been stressed in the LMX theory (Cogliser & Schriesheim, 2000). Leadership processes do not exist in a vacuum; they develop within a work environment. Consequently, several scholars have claimed that leadership research should take into account a number of potential moderators of the relationship between LMX quality and its correlates (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Schriesheim et al., 1999; Schriesheim, Castro, Zhou, & Yammarino, 2001).

The present study contributes to the extension of LMX theory by analysing the relationship between LMX quality and role overload, and by investigating the moderator role of psychological climate (i.e., an employee's perception of his/her work environment) in the aforementioned relationship.

### LEADER – MEMBER EXCHANGE, ROLE STRESSORS, AND ROLE OVERLOAD

Within the framework of LMX theory, the relationship between leadership and role stressors has been previously addressed, showing significant negative relationships between LMX quality and two role stressors: role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997; Nelson, Basu, & Purdie, 1998; Williams, Posdakoff, & Huber, 1992). This research is based on the idea that leaders are one of the most important agents for role definition. Therefore, they will have an influence on the dysfunctional aspects of the role definition process; that is, they will have an impact on the levels of role stressors stemming from that process. In a meta-analytic study carried out by Jackson and Schuler (1985), the authors found different relationships between two types of role stressors (role conflict and role ambiguity) and their correlates. They found differences in the correlates identified, the strength of the relationships, and the plausibility of moderator variables. These results suggest the need to investigate the relationships between different types of role stressors and their correlates separately. Role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload are different constructs (Chambers, Moore, & Bachtel, 1998; Glazer & Beehr, 2005; Kahn & Byosiere, 1990; Peterson et al., 1995), and what applies for one of them may not necessarily be true for the other two. Moreover, the investigation of the LMX quality – role overload relationship is important from a practical point of view. Given the relevance of role overload as a source of stress for

workers (Paoli & Merllié, 2005), this kind of research may be useful for suggesting ways to reduce levels of experienced stress.

The LMX quality construct is directly related to the role of leaders as a source of important resources for their subordinates. Thus, it may be expected that the high level of resources received by employees having high quality LMX contributes to decreasing perceived role overload. On the contrary, a low quality relationship with the leader can be expected to increase role overload, since it means a lower level of resource exchange. This line of reasoning is supported by research showing that employees with high quality LMX are more likely to receive resources, information, support, and training opportunities from their leaders (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000; Scandura, Graen, & Novak, 1986). Moreover, employees with high quality LMX relationships are more likely to feel empowered and, therefore, enabled to exert stronger influence on their leaders. High quality LMX is supposed to give a broader negotiating latitude to the worker over his/her work, and, consequently, it may allow workers to reduce the number or difficulty of assignments when these are excessive.

Research showing within-group differences in job demands has also suggested that there is an influence of the leader – member relationship in job demand perceptions. Van Yperen and Snijders (2000) found that employees sharing the same jobs, role demands, and responsibilities, and reporting to the same supervisor, expressed different levels of perceived job demands. The authors suggest that these differences in perceived job demands could not simply be accounted for by individual differences, but that they may stem from differential treatment by the supervisor. Specifically, these authors pointed to the LMX theory as an appropriate theoretical framework to explain the observed differences in perceived job demands. Considering the arguments and findings presented above, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1:** LMX quality will be negatively related to role overload.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE AS A MODERATOR

Several LMX researchers have stressed the need to examine the potential moderators of the relationship between LMX quality and its correlates (Cogliser & Schriesheim, 2000; Gerstner & Day, 1997). However, “situational moderators of LMX have infrequently been proposed and studied; and more typically, LMX and LMX-outcome relationships have been examined without considering various potential contingency factors” (Schriesheim et al., 2001, p. 525).

Psychological climate is defined as the employee's perceptions of the work environment in which the work behaviour occurs (Rousseau, 1988). Thus, it is reasonable to suspect that these perceptions can affect the relationship between LMX quality and work outcomes. The content of climate perceptions refers to different aspects of the work environment, such as the degree of supportive relationships and the degree to which innovation is promoted. Therefore, the content of climate perceptions can be classified into groups of psychologically related events and meanings (Schneider & Reichers, 1983). "This implies that climates in work settings have numerous facets" (Rousseau, 1988, p. 147). Previous research (Hofmann, Morgerson, & Gerras, 2003) found that the facet of safety climate moderated the relationship between LMX quality and the subordinates' consideration of safety citizenship behaviours as being part of their formal role. In this study, we have considered four different, important facets of psychological climate (González-Romá, Peiró, Lloret, & Zornoza, 1999; Kopelman, Brief, & Guzzo, 1990; Koys & DeCotiis, 1991; van Muijen et al., 1999): support (the extent to which there are kindly and supportive relationships among work team members); innovation (the extent to which there is openness to new ideas and projects and their implementation is supported); goals orientation (the extent to which activities and behaviours are oriented towards the attainment of previously established objectives); and rules orientation (the extent to which employees' behaviour is regulated by formal norms and rules). These four climate facets are based on Quinn and Rohrbaugh's (1983) competing values theoretical framework (see van Muijen et al., 1999).

In the present research, we expect the four facets of psychological climate considered to be moderators of the relationship between LMX quality and role overload. As we have previously stated, one of the reasons we expect LMX quality to be related negatively to role overload is its function as a source of support for employees. Other sources of support may be available for employees in their work environments, such as co-workers' support. In work environments in which other sources of support are scarce, support provided by leaders will be a critical factor in employees' role performance. In these work environments, LMX quality may have a stronger impact on role overload reduction than in environments where other sources of support are available. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2a:** Support climate will moderate the relationship between LMX quality and role overload, so that as support climate increases, the strength of the relationship between LMX quality and role overload decreases.

Innovation is an important strategy for organizational development. Innovation results from two component processes: (1) creativity, or the

generation of novel ideas, and (2) the implementation of novel ideas (O'Reilly, Williams, & Barsade, 1998; West & Farr, 1990). In work environments with a high orientation towards innovation, employees will have more demands related to proposing new solutions to problems, finding new ways of working, elaborating new products or services, and coordinating among themselves in order to implement novel ideas, than in environments with a low orientation towards innovation. In the former case, leaders will be a key valuable resource as a source of information, support, and guidance for dealing with the innovation-related demands. Thus, we propose that, in work environments with a high orientation towards innovation, the relationship between LMX quality and role overload will be stronger than in work environments with a low orientation towards innovation. Consequently, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2b:** Innovation climate will moderate the relationship between LMX quality and role overload, so that as innovation climate increases, the strength of the relationship between LMX quality and role overload increases as well.

Goals achievement is critical for the success of organizations. In work environments with a high goals orientation, the achievement of goals is perceived as a key priority. Consequently, employees in these environments will receive stronger and more frequent demands related to the attainment of their goals than employees in environments with a low goals orientation. In the former situation, the resources provided by leaders (information, knowledge, tools, and strategies) for meeting goals achievement demands (that is, for dealing with role overload) will be much more important. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2c:** Goals orientation will moderate the relationship between LMX quality and role overload, so that as goals orientation increases, the strength of the relationship between LMX quality and role overload increases as well.

In work environments with a high rules orientation, formal leaders have more formal power and exert more control over resources than in work environments with a low rules orientation. Thus, when rules orientation is high, the role of leaders as providers of resources to employees is critical, if the latter want to succeed in satisfying their role demands. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2d:** Rules orientation will moderate the relationship between LMX quality and role overload, so that as rules orientation climate

increases, the relationship between LMX quality and role overload increases as well.

## METHOD

### Sample and procedures

The data analysed in the present study were provided by 383 nonsupervisor employees who worked in 33 health care centres of a Regional Public Health Service. The size of the centres ranged between 6 and 55 members, with a mean size of 28.5 ( $SD = 14.5$ ). Twenty-three centres provided physical health care services (Primary Health Care Centres, PHC), and 10 centres provided mental health care services (Mental Health Care Centres, MHC). Despite the different types of services offered, all the centres implemented a unit-based approach to health care, operated in the same province, and depended on the same administrative authority. In each centre, a physician performed the role of team manager. Together with these similarities, there were also some differences in team size (PHC: mean = 34.3,  $SD = 8.7$ , MHC: mean = 15.9,  $SD = 13.2$ ) and composition between the two types of centres. Centres providing physical health services were composed of family physicians, paediatricians, nurses, social workers, and auxiliary and administrative personnel. Centres providing mental health services were composed of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and auxiliary and administrative personnel. A number of *t*-tests were conducted to see whether there were differences between the groups of professionals working in PHCs and MHCs. Statistically significant differences were observed in only one out of the six variables involved (support climate:  $t = -3.3$ ,  $p < .001$ , PHC mean = 3.1, MHC mean = 3.5). In general terms, we can conclude that the differences between the two professional groups in the study variables were not important. However, in order to see whether the type of centre affected the results obtained, the analyses to test our hypotheses were conducted both including and not including type of centre as a control variable. The results obtained in both cases were similar, and they did not affect the study conclusions. For the sake of simplicity, we report the results obtained when type of centre was not included in the regression equations as a control.

Questionnaires were distributed to the nonsupervisor employees by a member of our research team, who visited each of the 33 centres asking for cooperation and guaranteeing confidentiality of data. Questionnaires were returned by mail. Four hundred and twenty-one nonsupervisor employees responded, yielding a response rate of 46.5%. However, only 383 nonsupervisor employees responded to all the questionnaire items. This sample composed of 383 subjects was the one we used for testing the hypotheses of

the present study. Forty-three per cent were males. Average age was 36.4 ( $SD = 7.4$ ), average organizational tenure was 4.6 years ( $SD = 2.9$ ), and average professional tenure was 10.4 years ( $SD = 6.5$ ).

## Measures

*LMX quality* was measured by using the 7-item Leader–Member Exchange scale developed by Scandura and Graen (1984) (e.g., “Do you know how satisfied your supervisor is with you?”, “To what extent do you find your supervisor able to understand your problems and needs?”, “To what extent do you think your supervisor recognizes your potential?”). Respondents answered using a 4-point scale, where 1 was indicative of a high quality LMX, and 4 was indicative of a low quality LMX. Prior to computing LMX quality scores, we reversed the response scale, so that high scores were indicative of high quality LMX. Reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha) yielded an internal consistency coefficient of .88.

*Climate* dimensions were measured using the questionnaire developed by the FOCUS (First Organizational Climate/Culture Unified Search) international research group (see van Muijen et al., 1999, for a detailed description). This questionnaire measures the four climate dimensions defined previously: support (8 items, “How many people with personal problems are getting help?”), innovation (12 items, “How many people are expected to find new ways to solve problems?”), goals orientation (14 items, “How often is individual appraisal directly related to the attainment of goals?”), and rules orientation (6 items, “How often do communications follow the formal hierarchy?”). Subjects were asked to describe, not evaluate, the climate of their health centre. This process was introduced “to maximize the respondent’s use of actual experiences as a basis for describing a climate” (Joyce & Slocum, 1984, p. 727). Respondents answered using a 6-point scale (1 = strongly in disagreement, 6 = strongly in agreement). The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) computed for each climate scale was: .73 for support, .77 for innovation, .83 for goals orientation, and .60 for rules orientation.

*Role overload* was measured with three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Camman, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1979; e.g., “The amount of work I am expected to do in my work is too much”). Respondents answered using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly in disagreement, 5 = strongly in agreement). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was .87.

## Analysis

The first hypothesis, which concerned the negative relationship between LMX quality and role overload, was tested by computing the bivariate

correlation between the two variables. Separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses for each climate dimension were conducted to test the moderator influence of psychological climate in the relationship between LMX quality and role overload. In the first step, LMX quality was entered into the regression equation as a predictor. In the second step, we entered the corresponding climate dimension. Finally, the interaction term between LMX quality and climate was entered into the regression equation. Analyses were conducted with the SPSS .12 program.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the bivariate correlations among the study variables. A significant negative correlation was found between LMX quality and role overload ( $r = -.17, p < .01$ ), so that the higher the quality of LMX, the lower the role overload perceived by employees. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

The four separate hierarchical regression analyses carried out to test Hypotheses 2a–2d showed that three out of the four climate dimensions considered (innovation, goals orientation, and rules orientation) moderated the relationship between LMX quality and role overload (see Table 2). In all three cases, the interaction term was statistically significant and accounted for a significant proportion of the variance of role overload. No support was found for the moderator hypothesis when support climate was the hypothesized moderator. In order to better understand the interaction effects found, we plotted them (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). The three graphs show that the relationship between LMX quality and role overload was stronger when the corresponding climate dimension was high than when it was low. Therefore, Hypotheses 2b–2d were substantially supported.

As mentioned earlier, support climate did not moderate the LMX quality–role overload relationship. However, we found that support climate

TABLE 1  
Correlations among LMX, role overload, and psychological climate dimensions

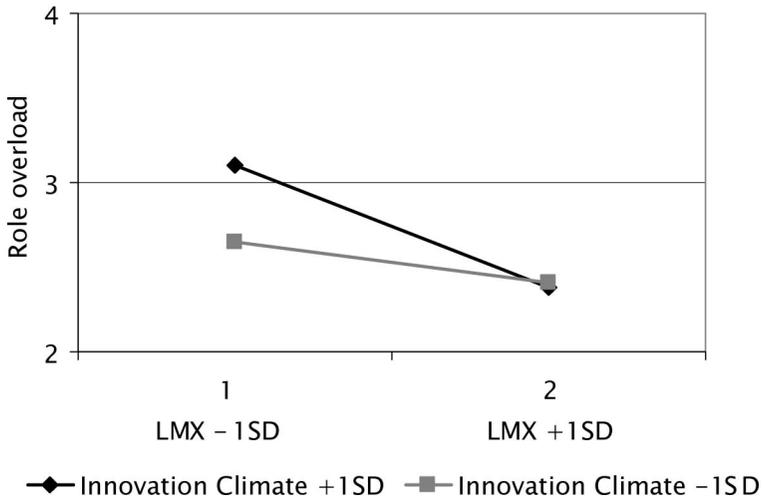
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. LMX	2.60	.59					
2. Role overload	3	1.23	-.17**				
3. Support	3.15	.81	.63**	-.19**			
4. Innovation	2.75	.60	.44**	-.02	.61**		
5. Goals orientation	2.98	.76	.41*	-.04	.56**	.71**	
6. Rules orientation	3.46	.79	.41**	-.22**	.51**	.47**	.59**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

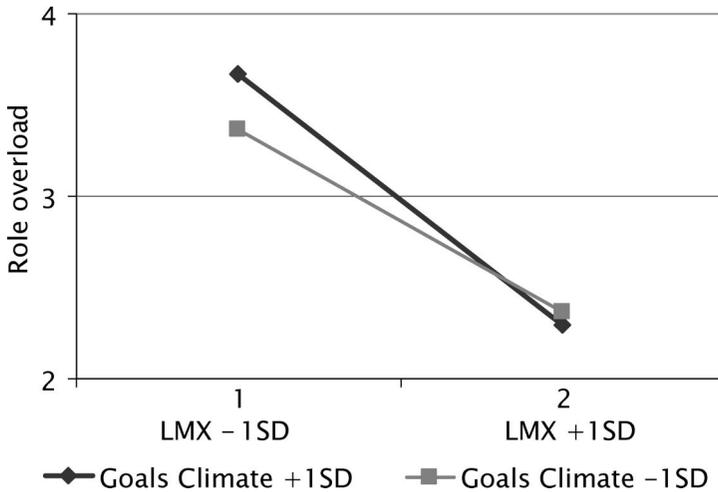
TABLE 2  
 Hierarchical regression analyses of role overload on LMX and psychological climate dimensions

<i>Climate dimension</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Support			
Step 1			
LMX	-.15*	.02**	
Step 2			
LMX	-.05		
Support	-.16*	.04*	.02*
Step 3			
LMX	-.05		
Support	-.16*		
Interaction term	-.03	.03	.00
Innovation			
Step 1			
LMX	-.17**	.03**	
Step 2			
LMX	-.20**		
Innovation	.08	.03	.00
Step 3			
LMX	-.22**		
Innovation	.09		
Interaction term	-.12*	.04*	.01*
Goals orientation			
Step 1			
LMX	-.17**	.03**	
Step 2			
LMX	-.19**		
Goals orientation	.04	.03	.00
Step 3			
LMX	-.20**		
Goals orientation	.06		
Interaction term	-.11*	.04*	.01*
Rules orientation			
Step 1			
LMX	-.17**	.03	
Step 3			
LMX	-.09		
Rules orientation	-.18**	.05	.03**
Step 4			
LMX	-.09		
Rules orientation	-.19**		
Interaction term	-.11*	.06	.01*

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

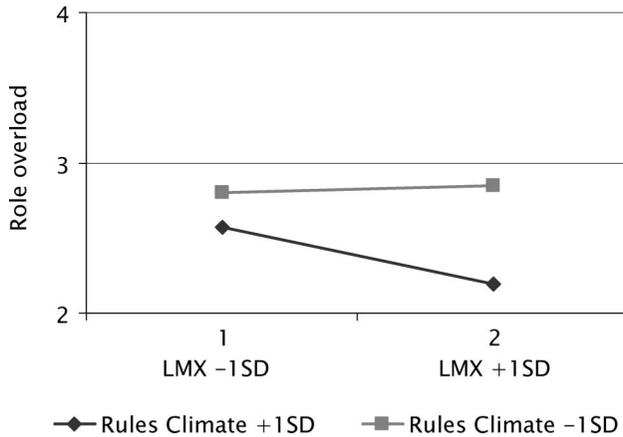


**Figure 1.** Moderator effects of innovation climate on the relationship between LMX and role overload.



**Figure 2.** Moderator effects of goals orientation on the relationship between LMX and role overload.

was negatively related to role overload, and when the former variable was entered into the regression equation as a predictor in Step 2, LMX quality lost its significant relationship with role overload.



**Figure 3.** Moderator effects of rules orientation on the relationship between LMX and role overload.

These results suggest that support climate might mediate the LMX quality–role overload relationship. An alternative explanation suggested by one of the anonymous reviewers was that LMX quality and support climate overlapped considerably, so that the latter did not moderate the aforementioned relationship because our operationalizations of LMX quality and support climate were essentially measures of the same construct. To rule out this alternative explanation, we submitted the LMX quality and the support climate items to a Confirmatory Factor Analysis. We compared the fits of two alternative models: a one-factor model in which all the items were considered indicators of the same underlying construct, and a two-factor model in which the LMX quality and the support climate items loaded on two distinct correlated factors. Considering the ordinal nature of the items involved, we analysed the polychoric correlation matrix and used the Weighted Least Squares estimation method as implemented in Lisrel 8.30. The two-factor model showed a better fit to data,  $\chi^2(89) = 221.5$ ,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .06; SRMS = .12; NNFI = .92; CFI = .93, than the one-factor model,  $\chi^2(90) = 286.3$ ,  $p < .01$ ; RMSEA = .08; SRMS = .21; NNFI = .88; CFI = .91. According to the  $\chi^2$  values obtained for both models, the difference in fit between the two models was statistically significant,  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(1) = 64.8$ ,  $p < .01$ , supporting the two-factor model as the best fitting model. Thus, we concluded that the LMX quality and the support climate items measured discriminable constructs.

Next, we investigated whether the LMX quality–role overload relationship was fully mediated by support climate. We did so by implementing a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) approach to testing mediation (see

James, Mulaik, & Brett, 2006), using observed variables and maximum likelihood estimation methods. First, we tested the full mediation model: LMX quality  $\rightarrow$  support climate  $\rightarrow$  role overload. The fit of this model was good,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.53$ ,  $p > .05$ ; RMSEA = .04; SRMR = .02; NNFI = .99; CFI = 1, and all the parameter estimates involved were statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). Second, we compared the fit of this model to the fit of a partial mediation model, which also included the LMX quality  $\rightarrow$  role overload relationship. This model is a just-identified model with zero degrees of freedom whose fit is perfect, that is,  $\chi^2(0) = 0$ ,  $p \leq 1$ . The test of the difference in fit between the two models,  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(1) = 1.53$ ,  $p > .05$ , revealed a nonsignificant difference in fit. Therefore, and according to the parsimony principle of science, the full mediation model was selected as an adequate model for representing the relationships among LMX quality, support climate, and role overload.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to analyse the moderator influence of psychological climate on the relationship between LMX quality and role overload. Before testing the moderator hypothesis, we investigated whether LMX quality was negatively related to role overload (Hypothesis 1). The results obtained supported our hypothesis and showed that employees who reported high quality LMX tended to report lower levels of role overload. In this sense, the present research makes a contribution to understanding one important and pervasive stressor that employees encounter in fulfilling their organizational roles. Moreover, it contributes to the development of LMX research. Furthermore, the results are congruent with previous findings reported on the relationships between LMX quality and other role stressors. In their meta-analysis, Gerstner and Day (1997) found that LMX quality was negatively related to role conflict and role ambiguity. Taken together, all these findings indicate that LMX quality is negatively associated with the three major role stressors, and they support the idea that leadership is an important factor in the development of role stress processes (Kelloway et al., 2004).

Our second set of hypotheses (Hypotheses 2a–2d) referred to the moderator role of psychological climate in the relationship between LMX quality and role overload. The results obtained revealed that for three out of the four climate dimensions considered, the moderator hypothesis was confirmed. The climate facets of innovation, goals orientation, and rules orientation moderated the aforementioned relationship, whereas support climate did not. As we expected, the LMX quality–role overload relationship was stronger when innovation climate, goals orientation, and rules orientation were high than when these climate dimensions were low.

Considering that “situational moderators of LMX have infrequently been proposed and studied” (Schriesheim et al., 2001, p. 525), the moderator effects found here contribute to filling a gap in the LMX literature. Hofmann et al. (2003) also found previously that safety climate perceptions moderated the relationship between LMX quality and the subordinates’ consideration of safety citizenship behaviours as part of their formal role. Taken together, these results suggest that perceptions of the work environment are important boundary conditions for the relationship between LMX quality and its hypothesized correlates.

Contrary to our hypothesis, support climate did not moderate the relationship between LMX quality and role overload. Instead, we found that this relationship was fully mediated by support climate. These results are congruent with the idea that leaders are climate engineers (Naumann & Bennett, 2000) who contribute to modelling employees’ climate perceptions (González-Romá, Peiró, & Tordera, 2002; Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). Our results point out that by developing high quality relationships with their employees, leaders can foster employees’ perceptions of support in their work environments. However, as these results were obtained a posteriori, they must be interpreted with caution, at least until future studies yield additional empirical evidence about the fully mediated relationship.

The results obtained suggest some practical implications. As Sonnentag and Frese (2003) indicate, stress reduction interventions should be designed not only to reduce excessive demands, but also to increase resources. From this perspective, developing high quality relationships between leaders and employees seems to be an important strategy for providing employees with resources that allow them to handle role demands effectively. Thus, interventions aimed at increasing the quality of LMX should be encouraged. Moreover, these interventions must take into account employees’ work environment. Our results suggest that interventions aimed at increasing the quality of leader–employee relationships would be especially beneficial in work environments where there is an emphasis on innovation, goals achievement, and rules compliance.

The present study has a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting our findings. First, because we used a cross-sectional design, we cannot make causal inferences about the relationships among the considered variables. For instance, it is possible that the existence of employees with high levels of role overload triggered the supervisors’ helping behaviour, which in turn may have led to higher levels of LMX quality as perceived by the employees. Future investigations with a longitudinal design will have to clarify the directions of the relationships found here. Second, the sample composition was limited to employees working in health care centres. Thus, our conclusions cannot be generalized

to other occupational samples and organizational contexts. Therefore, replications of this research are needed. And third, all the measures were performed using self-reported data; consequently, the observed relationships might be affected to some degree by common method variance. However, Spector (2006), after analysing the available empirical evidence, concludes that the idea that the method itself produces systematic variance in observations that inflates correlations among variables to any significant degree is questionable. He highlights the fact that many monomethod correlations among theoretically related variables in published studies are nonsignificant. Therefore, “this hardly supports the idea that common method variance is a universal inflator of correlations” (Spector, 2006, p. 224). In fact, Williams and Brown (1994) showed that, under some circumstances, method variance could attenuate correlations rather than inflate them. Nevertheless, future research could try to collect information from different sources, in order to reduce this potential limitation. In this sense, also using a measure of LMX quality as perceived by the leaders would be helpful.

In the past few years, some scholars have suggested that the relationship between LMX quality and its hypothesized correlates might be moderated by situational factors (Cogliser & Schriesheim, 2000; Gerstner & Day, 1997). Our study makes a contribution to the literature by showing that the relationship between LMX quality and role overload is moderated by psychological climate, which is a central feature of the psychosocial context.

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