

AN EXPLORATORY EXAMINATION OF SUPERVISOR UNDERMINING, EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT CLIMATE, AND THE EFFECTS ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY IN QUICK-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

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Customer retention has become a continuous focus of service organizations and is especially salient in the quick-service restaurant industry due to the short time with the consumer. Restaurant employees being part of the product play imperative role in keeping customers happy and coming back. However, there is no complete understanding of factors that make employees perform their best and satisfy customers. The aim of this article is to explore how employee involvement climate, a construct composed of power, information, rewards and knowledge, and supervisor undermining are related to customer perceptions of service quality. Additionally, the interaction between employee involvement climate and supervisor undermining is tested. Results suggest that a significant interaction exists between these two constructs and are key predictors in increasing or decreasing customer perceptions of service quality.

KEYWORDS: *employee involvement; undermining; customer service; quick-service restaurants*

The restaurant industry is larger than ever in the United States with the total number of employees topping 12.7 million people, or around 9% of the total labor force (National Restaurant Association, 2010). With consumers spending less or changing habits to hedge economic changes, restaurants are becoming more conscious of what is most important in retaining and gaining customers: service quality (George & Hancer, 2003; Han & Ryu, 2009). In the hospitality industry, employees are part of the product and, therefore, service quality is primarily a function of how employees perform. Although service quality research is far from being new, the antecedents for how customers perceive service and what role employees play in varying hospitality contexts needs to be expanded.

Customer perceptions of exceptional service have been linked to a variety of positive outcomes for the organization, including increased customer satisfaction, retention, and loyalty, which in turn have been shown to lead to higher profits for an organization (Borucki & Burke, 1999; Bowen, Siehl, & Schneider, 1989; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). Nevertheless, no consensus about what makes customers perceive service as excellent has been reached. This is because of the strong contextual nature of perceptions. In other words, depending on individual reference points, consumers' perceptions may vary tremendously when applied to the same subject (Lichtenstein & Bearden, 1989). Fine dining restaurants are perceived differently from quick-service restaurants in what is expected in a service encounter. Therefore, the need to examine what makes customers perceive service as exceptional in the quick-service restaurants is of vital importance to fill gaps in the hospitality literature (Yuan & Wu, 2008).

Researchers have suggested that employee attitudes and behaviors may be the critical link to the customer's perception of service quality and satisfaction (Kim & Ok, 2010). This is especially salient in a competitive landscape, such as that of quick-service restaurants, in which flexibility and the ability to act responsively to competitive changes in product and service improvement is a necessity (Riordan, Vandenberg, & Richardson, 2005). In highly competitive environments, such as the quick-service industry, it has been suggested that employee involvement is a key variable to foster employees' capabilities that aid organizations in producing high-quality products and services (Riordan et al., 2005). Organizations that provide its employees with high involvement training have been shown to generate high involvement climates. In turn, those organizations that have high involvement climates tend to produce products or services of a higher quality (Han & Ryu, 2009; Riordan et al., 2005).

Research on employee involvement climate in the hospitality literature is scarce despite the empirical support it has received with regard to improving service performance (e.g., friendliness, helpfulness, responsiveness; Borucki & Burke, 1999; Liao & Chuang, 2004). The need for research of the employee involvement climate construct is increasing in the hospitality literature as more and more *Fortune* 1000 companies, many of which are hospitality organizations, are using employee involvement training (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995; Tesluk, Vance, & Mathieu, 1999). By incorporating employee involvement into the present research, the authors seek to open new doors within the hospitality literature through the generation of both theoretical and applied research.

Another concept this study examines is supervisor undermining. Supervisor undermining has been shown to have detrimental effects on employee working behaviors and organizational climate (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Tepper, 2007). Therefore, it is particularly important to the quick-service restaurant industry, in which a multiunit structure with multiple unit cultures is commonly used, to look at this concept. Employees in the restaurant industry should be

concerned with the attitudes and well-being of their employees, as a satisfied workforce is likely to be a productive workforce (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008). Instead, over the past several years there have been an increased number of reports on the abusive behaviors in commercial kitchens including bullying, verbal abuse, and even violence (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Johns & Menzel, 1999). Abuse in kitchens may be seen more as a common part of work or a norm than in other industries due to the high stress, tight working conditions, physical temperature, and noise of the environment (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Johns & Menzel, 1999; Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007; Taylor, 1977). In reality, undermining conducted by a supervisor may have a negative impact on working behaviors, production, and service quality outcomes.

Therefore, when considering the context of quick-service restaurants, the research questions addressed in the present study are as follows:

Research Question 1: Does an employee involvement climate affect customer perception of service quality?

Research Question 2: Does supervisor undermining affect customer perceptions of service quality?

Research Question 3: How does the interaction effect of employee involvement climate and supervisor undermining effect customer perceptions of service quality?

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it explores employee involvement climate and its effects on customer perceptions of service quality. Past literature has shown positive relationships between employee involvement at group level and customer satisfaction (Kizilos, Cummings, & Strickstein, 1994) as well as employee involvement and service performance qualities such as friendliness, helpfulness, responsiveness, and knowledge of a product or service (Liao & Chuang, 2004), but yet to use employee involvement climate as a construct in relation to perceived service quality in quick-service restaurants. Second, this study examines the effects of supervisor undermining behavior on service quality in quick-service restaurants. To date, no study has been conducted to address such issues.

Third, the interaction effects of undermining on the relationship between employee involvement climate and overall customer evaluations of service quality are explored. Examining interaction effects, also known as a moderation effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986), in the present case seems relevant because the magnitude of the effect of employee involvement on customer perceptions of service quality may vary as a function of supervisor undermining (Preacher, 2003). Some unspecified moderator effects are likely to exist in cases where a relationship holds in one setting but not in another (Baron & Kenny, 1986). It may be that supervisor undermining alters the strength of the relationship between employee involvement climate and customer perceptions of service quality, thus acting as a moderator in the relationship between employee involvement climate and service quality. The theoretical and practical implications that result from moderator effects are then discussed.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Employee Involvement Climate

Climate, according to Shadur, Kienzle, and Rodwell (1999), is “shared perceptions of organizational policies, practices, and procedures, both formal and informal” (p. 480). Morgeson and Hofmann (1999) further expand that climate is “any given collective viewed as a series of ongoing, events, and event cycles between the component parts (e.g., individuals)” (p. 252). Moreover, collective constructs such as climates “emerge from interaction and can, over time, come to influence systems of interaction” (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999, p. 262).

This study’s focus is on employee involvement climate, which can play a critical role in the performance of service units as companies with high involvement climate experience increases in efficiency and quality of the services provided (Tesluk, Farr, Mathieu, & Vance, 1995). Employee involvement climate facilitates high employee involvement levels by concentrating on four distinct variables, power, information, rewards, and knowledge, collectively known as PIRK (Lawler, 1996). The PIRK framework as presented by Lawler (1996) implies that employees must have the power to make decisions on the job. To make decisions that require power, the employee must have the knowledge of the business. Additionally, to use the power in the proper situation and manner, information regarding goals set forth by the company is needed. As a result of using the information and knowledge to make an informed decision, the employee in turn is rewarded for the action based on performance (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). To have a high employee involvement climate, the collective of individuals within a unit must have high agreement on all four elements of PIRK (Lawler, 1996; Lawler et al., 1995; Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). Richardson and Vandenberg (2005), with support from Lawler (1996), provide an example of why all variables should be of high level and, therefore, measured together:

Workers with power, but no information and knowledge, are likely to make poor decisions or doubt their ability to make good decisions when acting independently. Without performance-based rewards, there is also no guarantee that they will use their power in ways that will benefit the work unit. Those with performance-based rewards, but nothing else, are likely to be frustrated and unmotivated because they cannot influence their rewards. Information and knowledge without power is also frustrating because workers cannot act on their expertise. (p. 563)

Employee involvement has thus far been primarily measured at the individual level and is considered an evolving line of research (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). Past research that has examined involvement at both the individual and unit (climate) levels has generally found that involvement positively affects organizational effectiveness (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). Because the literature on employee involvement climates is still growing, it is important to consider how involvement at an individual level has influenced different outcomes because a climate of involvement cannot exist without high PIRK in each individual of the group (Lawler, 1996; Lawler et al., 1995;

Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). Locke and Schweiger (1979) conclude that most studies reported a positive relationship between employee involvement and job satisfaction. Fenton-O'Creevy (1998) further proposes that the use of employee involvement practices was related to changes in employee attitudes such as job satisfaction, commitment, and felt responsibility. Additionally, employee improvements in quality, productivity, and responsiveness to customers as a result of employee involvement practices were found in the same study.

However, a call to expand Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) suggestion that managers are a direct and indirect link to an involvement climate is needed to fill the voids in this evolving stream of research. Specifically, the argument stands that a manager's interpretation of the organizational- or unit-level environment will shape the attitudes of the unit's employees and the development of an employee involvement climate (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). Moreover, it is argued that involvement climate's benefits are likely to "function through the collective, rather than individual, influence of employees' attitudes and behaviors and that these are likely to be associated with the unit-level motivational influences of employees' immediate managers" (Richardson & Vandenberg, p. 562).

Management plays a critical role as the foundation for the initialization of employee involvement programs that are designed to increase how employees carry out work (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998). McMahan, Bell, and Virick (1998) claim that PIRK must be pushed down from the top management through the organization to a level in which performance can be affected. As managers or supervisors at the lowest level in an organization develop PIRK in their employees, the employees may in turn believe they have more to offer to customers without constant approval from the supervisors or managers (Brown, Reich, & Stern, 1993).

Employee involvement climate has yielded results that support organizational effectiveness outcomes. Riordan et al. (2005) show that employee involvement climate is positively related to financial performance, lower turnover, and higher morale. Additionally, Schneider and Bowen (1993) explain how service organizations, such as restaurants, have a particular need for a strong climate characterized by high employee involvement. Since service organizations have a thin separation between employees and customers, they must stress service quality to front-line employees who interact with customers as well as the management within the units. Employee involvement climate may result in improved employee performance, motivation, and attitudes, which in turn may create higher quality products and service (Riordan et al., 2005).

Past research has also demonstrated relationships between employee involvement and customer-related outcomes including satisfaction and service performance (Kizilos et al., 1994; Liao & Chuang, 2004). Liao and Chuang (2004) supported the relationship between employee involvement at a group level and service performance as defined by Borucki and Burke (1999). Service performance in that study's context included friendliness, responsiveness, speed, helpfulness, and suggestive selling. Moreover, Kizilos et al. (1994) found that employee involvement operationalized at a store level directly related to

discretionary service behaviors as well as role clarity. The authors reported that employee involvement climate affects customer satisfaction when mediated by these discretionary service behaviors.

In quick-service restaurants, climate can be especially important in terms of employee functions and different types of performance. Because climates emerge from the collective beliefs in the unit, climates can greatly vary from one unit to another, even within the same organization (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). The structure of the quick-service restaurant industry makes this point especially salient. Additionally, since quick-service restaurants typically rely on short interactions performed by a younger employee base with high turnover (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010), understanding how climates, especially an employee involvement climate, function in restaurants is important in creating success. An extensive search of the hospitality literature has yet to examine employee involvement climate as a collective reflection of employee involvement. A collective- or unit-level approach provides a practical resource for restaurant supervisors or managers as well as a theoretical extension to hospitality research.

Despite the lack of research on involvement climate, several studies report relationships between empowerment and involvement, helping reinforce the present study (e.g., Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004; Zohar, 2000, 2002). Psychological empowerment is said to be composed of four dimensions consisting of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995, 1996) and is largely influenced by Lawler's (1996) work on involvement (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005). These variables, although similar, are distinctly different. Involvement includes the four variables of power, information, rewards, and knowledge. Specifically, Spreitzer (1996) states that "it is individuals' perceptions of their working environment that shape empowerment" (p. 486). It has been suggested that empowerment is a result of employee involvement in the decision-making process of an organization (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005).

Given the notion that an employee involvement climate may lead to empowerment, it is important to look at the relationships between empowerment climate and performance outcomes. Gazzoli, Hancer, and Park (2010) found that empowerment had a direct link to job satisfaction and indirectly was related to service quality. In terms of climate on a collective level, Seibert, Silver, and Randolph (2004) found that empowerment climate at the work-unit level was positively related to work-unit performance.

Empowerment climate has also been linked to task performance, which is described as behaviors that add value to the core activities of an organization (Borman & Motowildo, 1993; Tuuli & Rowlinson, 2009). Likewise, resistance to empowerment climate has been found to have a negative, indirect relationship with customer service and team performance (Maynard, Mathieu, Marsh, & Ruddy, 2007). Most recently, Wallace, Johnson, Mathe, and Paul (in press) suggest that psychological empowerment climate, when moderated by felt accountability, leads to greater levels of customer perceptions of service quality and total revenues.

Similar to Wallace et al.'s (in press) study on empowerment climate, employee involvement is an isomorphic function (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005) in that it captures the unit's involvement climate as developed and shared across the employees (Chan, 1998; Chen, Bliese, & Mathieu, 2005; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). James et al. (2008) claim that "shared perceptual agreement at the individual level of analysis in climate research provides the meaning of the construct at a higher level of analysis" (p. 17). Using this notion of shared psychological constructs with the isomorphic nature of involvement (Richardson & Vandenberg, 2005), the authors conceptualize involvement climate as shared perceptions of involvement related to power, information, rewards, and knowledge. The previous foundation lends support for this study to look into how quick-service restaurant's employee involvement climate affects customer perceptions of service quality. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: In high employee involvement climate, customer perceptions of service quality will be greater than in low employee involvement climate.

Undermining

Undermining, as defined by Duffy et al. (2002) is a "behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work related success, and favorable reputation" directed at other individuals (p. 332). Undermining encompasses three dimensions: intent, insidiousness, and form of action performed. Undermining is an intentional act as perceived by the target receiving the undermining. Additionally, undermining behaviors are cumulative over time. One act of undermining should not result in a damaged relationship, but many acts of undermining will. Lastly, the underminer's behavior may be direct (verbal attack) or indirect (silent treatment) and may be verbal or physical (Duffy et al., 2002).

Undermining may influence employees' attitudes and behaviors and ultimately their performance at work. Supervisor undermining may lead to decreased employee self-efficacy and lower organizational commitment (Duffy et al., 2002). Because self-efficacy and job satisfaction have been shown to be related to employee performance (Chebat & Kollias, 2000), a decrease in self-efficacy due to undermining may lead to a decrease in job performance. Additionally, individuals who have been undermined also increase counterproductive work behaviors and complaints (Duffy et al., 2002). The concepts of supervisor undermining and abusive supervision are similar yet distinct in that undermining involves actions that directly affect and diminish self-worth (Hoobler & Brass, 2006), whereas abusive supervisions is a "subjective assessment made by subordinates regarding their supervisor's behavior toward them over time" (Hoobler & Brass, 2006, p. 1126). Tepper (2007) distinguishes between all constructs that involve nonphysical, supervisor hostility and claim that supervisor undermining is unique in that it is directed downward, does not encompass physical hostility, and includes reference to intended outcomes. On the other hand, abusive supervision does not define any references toward intended outcomes in its conceptual

definition. Both constructs involve a form of verbal attacks on the subordinate, but abusive supervision is referred to as a subjective assessment of verbal abuse while undermining refers to the number of incidents in which supervisor undermining diminishes the ability to maintain relationships and succeed in the workplace. In particular, abusive supervision measures items by an individual based on perceived frequency, whereas supervisor undermining uses a count of actual incidents.

Because supervisor undermining may be perceived as abusive, it is expected that many of the same outcomes that occur with abusive supervision will also occur with supervisor undermining. For example, abusive supervision, or hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors performed by supervisors (Hoobler & Brass, 2006; Tepper, 2000), has been shown to induce negative symptoms. Outcomes resulting from subordinates who experience abusive supervision include physical distress, drinking behaviors, supervisor-directed aggression, organizational deviance, depression, anxiety, and lower levels of affective commitment (Tepper, 2000; Tepper, Henle, Lambert, Giacalone, & Duffy, 2008). Employees with depression and anxiety show signs of poor work performance as well as a greater number of accidents, increased absenteeism, lower morale, and higher turnover (Haslam, Atkinson, Brown, & Haslam, 2005).

The root causes of why some individuals undermine and others do not stem from theories of social interaction and dispositional behaviors. Duffy, Shaw, Scott, and Tepper (2006) state, "As with many social behaviors, individuals may learn to engage in undermining behaviors by having direct experience with them or by observing and then modeling these behaviors" (p. 1067). Consistent with social learning theory (SLT), the modeling of behaviors through observation helps explain how undermining behaviors can be passed from upper management, through multiple levels to the end user. SLT indicates that "from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (Bandura, 1977, p. 22).

It is then reasonable to assume that lower-level employees observing their supervisor being undermined will model these behaviors and create a climate for undermining (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006). Therefore, supervisor undermining may have a trickle-down effect, where the act occurring at one level has the ability to move through differing channels of employees, affecting all individuals in the organization and in the end the customers. In the context of the present study, it is possible to assume that the front-line employees actually performing the service encounters are the ones reenacting the undermining behaviors and carrying on the negative connotations to their customers, in turn decreasing the customer service quality perceptions.

The importance of the present study in the area of undermining is twofold: it attempts to confirm that undermining leads to negative employee attitudes and feelings in a variety of contexts, and second, it tests whether undermining has an effect on customer perceptions of service quality. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Supervisor undermining will negatively influence customer perceptions of service quality.

A high employee involvement climate ensures the likelihood that each employee will be individually involved and in turn will provide better service quality. However, when supervisor undermining occurs, the collective employee involvement climate and its effects on service quality may be jeopardized by the feelings of irritability, depersonalization, and depression that can occur as a result of being undermined (Grant et al., 1993). Thus, the cumulative effects of undermining may diminish the positive effect employee involvement climate has on perceptions of service quality and, in turn, take away the decision-making abilities to provide the customer superior service. Consequently, it is hypothesized that supervisor undermining will interact with involvement climate leading to Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3: In a high employee involvement climate, customer perceptions of service quality will be greater when there is low supervisor undermining than when there is high supervisor undermining.

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

A quick-service restaurant organization with 649 corporate-owned stores in the United States was contacted personally by the researchers to participate in the study. Its store (unit) managers were offered a chance to win a \$50 monetary incentive for participating. These store managers were overseen by area supervisors, who were in charge of up to five different stores. Thus, we were interested in investigating the degree to which area supervisors undermined the store managers, ergo affecting customer service as explained earlier by means of SLT.

A survey design was developed to reach the largest number of managers possible. The store managers were surveyed over two time periods, once in summer and then 2 months later in early fall, to avoid common method variance (Rindfleisch, Malter, Ganesan, & Moorman, 2008). An online survey was used, and links to the surveys were available to the managers via a password-protected Intranet login.

Store managers were asked to assess employee involvement climate and supervisor undermining. The first wave of collection included the employee involvement climate measure. Of the 649 stores, 430 responded to the first wave of surveys forming a response rate of 66%. Following a method similar to Judge, Bono, Erez, and Locke (2005) for determination of response rate, the second wave of collection, which included the undermining measure and demographic variables, yielded 159 matched store numbers that participated in the previous survey resulting in a 37% response rate for Time 2 and an overall response rate of 24.4%. Of the 159 stores, 92 managers yielded matched, usable, and complete data in which they were making undermining judgments on 65 area supervisors (since supervisors oversee multiple stores).

The 67 units not included in the final analysis were eliminated based on four conditions. First, if the supervisor or manager of the unit changed from Time 1 to Time 2, the response was not used. Because the surveys were only 60 days apart, the researchers wanted to ensure there was ample time for the manager and supervisor to interact and build relationships with his or her given unit; therefore, these results were dropped. Second, if the manager or supervisor had not been employed for at least 3 months the response was not included. Because the total time between Time 1 and Time 2 collection was a total of 60 days, all responses that were marked "less than 3 months" were taken out. This was also to ensure a proper settling period within a job role. Third, the analysis also eliminated those whose employment began after the Time 1 data or was terminated after the Time 1 data collection. This was to ensure matched data for a given manager and supervisor rather than a given unit. The balance was eliminated based on nonmatched or incomplete data for a given manager. Additionally, nine stores provided a "matched" store number but no other information or data and were thus not included in the total sample count in Table 1. Table 1 provides detailed demographic characteristics on the total sample, provided some information was given in one of the demographic variable questions.

The managers were 46% female and 86% Caucasian (Table 1). Age was measured in segments including less than 16 years, 17 to 20 years, 21 to 25 years, 26 to 34 years, 35 to 50 years, and 51 years or older, per the request of the participating organization. Thirty-six percent of the managers were between the ages of 35 and 50 years. Tenure was similarly measured in segments including less than 3 months, 3 to 6 months, 6 to 12 months, 1 to 2 years, 2 to 5 years, 5 to 7 years, 7 to 10 years, 10 to 15 years, and 15 or greater years. Thirty-three percent had been with the organization for between 5 and 7 years.

Demographic information from the supervisors was obtained post hoc from the participating organization to help ensure external factors were not the cause of significant results. The organization provided complete demographic information on 51 supervisors. Although 65 supervisors oversaw these stores, full, complete demographic information (gender, age, race, tenure) was supplied by the sampled organization for only 51 of the supervisors. Supervisors were 91% Caucasian and 58% were above the age of 51 years. Sixty percent of the supervisors had been employed with the organization between 10 and 15 years. The participating organization provided general information on range and sizes of the stores in general but not of specific locations, a limitation of the study.

Measures

Employee involvement climate. Employee involvement climate was measured using the 8-item measure developed and tested by Richardson and Vandenberg (2005). This measure combined items from Vandenberg, Richardson, and Eastman (1999) and Riordan et al. (2005). Sample items included "My work unit is given enough authority to act and make decisions about our work" for the power variable. The information variable included sample item "Management gives sufficient notice to employees prior to making changes in policies." A reward sample item stated, "There is a strong link between how

Table 1
Manager Total and Used Sample Characteristics

Used Sample	Used Sample Percentage	Used Sample Count	Total Sample Percentage	Total Sample Count
Manager gender				
Male	54	50	55	82
Female	46	42	40	60
Missing	0	0	5	8
Manager race				
White	86	78	61	92
African American	7	6	8	12
Hispanic	7	6	6	9
Native American	1	1	1	2
Asian	0	0	0	1
Missing	0	0	23	34
Manager age (years)				
21-25	8	7	7	11
26-34	24	22	23	34
35-50	36	33	29	42
51+	32	29	23	35
Missing	0	0	19	28
Manager tenure				
<3 months	0	0	4	6
3-6 months	0	0	1	2
6-12 months	3	3	3	4
1-2 years	6	5	5	7
2-5 years	29	26	23	34
5-7 years	33	30	26	39
7-10 years	29	26	20	30
Missing	0	0	19	28

Note: 91 reported for race and age; 90 reported for tenure.

well members of my work unit perform their jobs and the likelihood of their receiving recognition and praise.” Last, the knowledge variable’s sample item included “Members of my work unit have had sufficient job related training.”

The measure used a 4-point Likert-type scale with anchors 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*. Psychometric findings from Richardson and Vandenberg (2005) supported a high internal reliability with a Cronbach alpha of .95. Riordan et al.’s (2005) scale, the scale that preceded Richardson and Vandenberg (2005), had composite reliability for each variable of power, information, rewards, and knowledge (training) at .87, .86, .85, and .89, respectively. To operationalize involvement climate, this study adopts the approach by Wallace et al. (in press) that measured empowerment climate though the empowerment felt by managers (the sample consisted of managers). The current study similarly operationalizes employee involvement climate as experienced by managers.

Supervisor undermining. Supervisor undermining was measured using one half of the 26-item scale developed and validated by Duffy et al. (2002). This scale included 13 items on coworker undermining and 13 items on supervisor undermining, and thus only the 13 items measuring supervisor undermining was used. In the instructions, the participants were to consider the past 30 days. The questions were then referenced by the introduction "How often has your supervisor intentionally" with sample item questions including "insulted you," "gave you the silent treatment," "hurt your feelings," and "undermined your effort to be successful on the job." The participants answered the item questions with response options 1 = *never*, 2 = *once or twice*, 3 = *about once a week*, 4 = *several times a week*, 5 = *almost everyday*, and 6 = *everyday*. The development of the undermining scale all yielded items with high loadings of .59 or above (Duffy et al., 2002). Additionally, Duffy et al. (2002) and Duffy, Ganster, et al. (2006) found that the internal consistency reliability for supervisor undermining was .92.

Customer perceptions of service quality. Customer perceptions of service quality were measured using data received from the participating organization. A third party organization was paid by the participating organization for mystery shops at each of the participating stores. Each mystery shop included ordering one main course, one side, and one drink off of the menu. The organization opted to not supply the form to the research team because of the clear identifying characteristics of the evaluation and therefore a factor analysis could not be run. However, a description about the items and areas of interest were obtained.

The use of mystery shopping compared with customer surveys has been found to be a more cost-effective method of evaluation, while also providing better feedback for the organization. This is due to the fact that those who evaluate the shop are trained to observe certain aspects of service during evaluation and therefore will provide the feedback necessary to appraise service (Finn & Kayande, 1999).

The reliability of mystery shopping as a form of performance evaluation is an acceptable measure. Dawson and Hillier (1995) suggest that an acceptable number of mystery shop evaluations were four at the outlet level over a 3-month period. The present study used a total of 3,937 shops for the 92 units averaged over a 12-month period. The minimum number of shops per store was 33, and the maximum over the 12-month period was 53. The average number of shops was 43.26 ($SD = 5.16$). Each unit was shopped at least 2 times per month, with an average shop visit per month of 3.2. The characteristics of the mystery shoppers evaluating the service were unavailable to the researchers as those shoppers were employed by a third party organization and demographic variables were not reported. The name of the employee, time of shop, and specific day of the shops was also not reported to the researchers due to the use of human subjects in the study.

Dimensions on which service was rated included appearance of the employees, responses to food orders, friendliness, accuracy, and food arrival. A total

of 18 items were used in the rating of service quality. The appearance of the employee included questions on the uniform and hygienic qualities of the employees. Responses to food orders tested the employee on the proper up sell of items after ordering, or offering additional items that may suit the customer's taste based on the order. The friendliness dimension included items about how the customer was greeted on ordering and the greeting of the employee transferring the food to the individual. Friendliness also included smiles received from the employees. Accuracy of the service included repeating the order back to the customer properly, distribution of correct change, as well as the actual items ordered being received by the customer. Offerings on food arrival included asking the customer if he or she needed additional napkins and/or other condiments. Items evaluating the service of the unit are rated on a 1 to 5 scale, 1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent*. The scores are then scaled to a 100-point measure for the simplicity of reporting to the restaurant units. The scores of each individual service encounter are collected and were then averaged by the sampled organization and then supplied to the researcher.

Controls

In the analysis, the authors controlled for several demographic variables of both the manager and the supervisor. Specifically, tenure and gender were controlled as both have been found to influence service performance (Ployhart, Wiechmann, Schmitt, Sacco, & Rogg, 2003). Additionally, the authors controlled for race and age. Because some of these controls have been found to be related to service performance in the past, the authors left them in the correlation matrix and in the moderated regression.

RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among factors can be found in Table 2. The construct reliabilities are visible in the correlation matrix diagonal, with supervisor undermining and employee involvement achieving an acceptable Cronbach's alpha with $\alpha = .90$ and $\alpha = .81$, respectively. The means of employee involvement climate and supervisor undermining shown in Table 2 are a sum of all items in the measure as previously described. The minimum of employee involvement climate was a total score of 14 and maximum of 30 (possible range = 8-32). Supervisor undermining had a minimum score of 13 and maximum of 38 (possible range = 13-78). Using histograms, the data appeared to be normally distributed. Nearly 80% of the supervisor undermining responses scored less than 20, but is consistent with averages in past studies (Duffy, Ganster, et al., 2006). Multicollinearity was assessed using variance inflation factor (VIF). Employee involvement climate, supervisor undermining, and the interaction between employee involvement climate and supervisor undermining all yielded VIFs of 1.161, 1.060, and 1.035, respectively, all far under the multicollinearity threshold value of 10. As seen in the bivariate correlations, both

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations

	Mean	SD	Employee Involvement Climate	Supervisor Undermining	Service Quality	Manager Gender	Manager Race	Manager Age	Manager Tenure
Employee involvement climate ^a	22.49	3.16	(.81)						
Supervisor undermining ^b	16.60	5.25	-.32**	(.90)					
Service quality ^c	85.36	4.32	.29**	-.26*	1				
Manager gender ^d	1.46	0.50	.25*	-.18	.17	1			
Manager race ^e	1.24	0.74	-.04	-.12	.16	-.09	1		
Manager age ^f	4.92	0.94	-.22*	.08	-.01	-.07	-.13	1	
Manager tenure ^g	6.70	1.25	-.13	.02	-.08	.20	.02	-.02	1

Note: *N* = 91.

a. Total score range 14-30; possible range 8-32.

b. Total score range 13-28; possible range 13-78.

c. Total score range 74.2-96.43; possible range 0-100.

d. Coded 1 = male, 2 = female.

e. Coded 1 = Caucasian, 2 = African American, 3 = Hispanic, 4 = Asian, 5 = Native American, 6 = Other.

f. Coded 1 = <16, 2 = 17-20, 3 = 21-25, 4 = 26-34, 5 = 35-50, 6 = 51+.

g. Coded 1 = <3 months, 2 = 3-6 months, 3 = 6-12 months, 4 = 1-2 years, 5 = 2-5 years, 6 = 5-7 years, 7 = 7-10 years, 8 = 10-15 years, 9 = 15+ years.

***p* < .01. **p* < .05.

manager gender and manager age were correlated with employee involvement climate and should thus be included in the regression analysis for control ($r = .248$, $r = .215$, $p < .05$, respectively). When including the supervisor demographics into the correlations ($n = 51$; not shown), supervisor tenure was significant and negatively related to customer perceptions of service quality ($r = -.305$, $p < .05$).

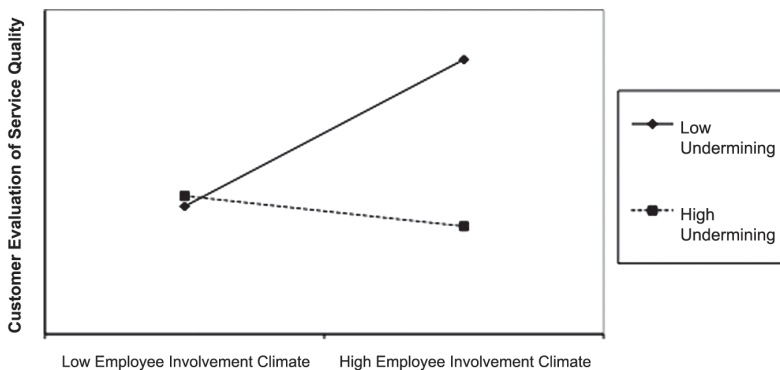
Support for Hypothesis 1 was found in that employee involvement climate was positively related to customer perceptions of service quality ($r = .286$, $p < .01$). Support for Hypothesis 2 was found in that supervisor undermining was negatively related to customer perceptions of service quality ($r = -.263$, $p < .05$). Table 3, Step 3 shows the regression analyses for the interaction effects. Significant two-way interactions were observed between employee involvement climate and supervisor undermining on customer perceptions of service quality ($\beta = 1.336$, $p < .05$) in support for Hypothesis 3. Entering supervisor demographics into the regression analysis (not shown) yielded similar results. Fifty-one cases of complete data between manager reported supervisor undermining, manager reported employee involvement, manager demographics, and supervisor demographics supported a significant interaction ($\beta = 2.611$, $p < .01$). Specifically, the interaction shows that when employee involvement climate is high and supervisor undermining is low, customer perceptions of service quality is greatest (Figure 1). Also, when employee involvement is high, high supervisor undermining yields the lowest perceptions of customer service. The interaction graph shown in Figure 1 shows “high” employee involvement and “low” employee

Table 3
Moderated Multiple Regression of Customer Perceptions of Service Quality on Employee Involvement Climate and Supervisor Undermining

Variables	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Step 1 (n = 92)				
Manager gender	0.197 [†]			
Manager race	0.167			
Manager age	-0.095			
Manager tenure	-0.115	0.081		1.865
Step 2 (n = 92)				
Manager gender	0.114			
Manager race	0.155			
Manager age	-0.048			
Manager tenure	-0.067			
Employee involvement (EIC)	.194 [†]			
Supervisor undermining (SU)	-.186 [†]	0.152	0.071	2.475*
Step 3 (n = 92)				
Manager gender	0.099			
Manager race	0.132			
Manager age	-0.026			
Manager tenure	-0.056			
Employee involvement (EIC)	.899*			
Supervisor undermining (SU)	-1.206 [†]			
EIC × SU	-1.336*	0.189	0.037	2.73**

**p < .01. *p < .05. [†]p < .10.

Figure 1
Employee Involvement, Supervisor Undermining Interaction



involvement as ± 1 standard deviation from the mean. This same deviation was used to graph supervisor undermining (Aiken & West, 1991; Dawson & Richter, 2006). Nominal differences occur between high and low supervisor undermining when employee involvement is low. Because the interaction effect was significant,

the main effects are confounded and the tests for main effects using regression should not be performed (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009).

Supplemental Analysis

To ensure agreement within the unit on employee involvement climate, assistant managers in the participating organization were asked to also rate the employee involvement climate within the 92 units. From the 92 units that responded, these units were contacted via e-mail and asked to have an assistant manager complete the employee involvement climate measure. Sixty-five assistant managers responded for a 71% response rate. A paired sample *t* test showed that the means between the manager's perception of employee involvement climate and the assistant manager's perception of employee involvement climate were not significantly different ($p = .451$). In other words, the manager and assistant manager agreed on the level of employee involvement climate supporting the collective views of the unit. The assistant managers, however, were not included in the moderated regression analysis, but are only used here to show agreement on employee involvement climate within restaurant units.

As mentioned previously, James et al. (2008) claim that "shared perceptual agreement at the individual level of analysis in climate research provides the meaning of the construct at a higher level of analysis" (p. 17). And although in the present study employee involvement climate does not measure the front-line, crew-level employees due to restrictions set forth by the participating organization, measurement of employee involvement climate by assistant managers assists in the convergence of the construct. Within the organization, assistant managers are paid hourly like a front-line employee and assume operational responsibilities similar to a front-line worker. The use of assistant managers is also a plausible additional sample for the reasoning that all assistant managers report to the managers sampled. Some front-line workers may not work directly with the manager depending on scheduling.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore how supervisor undermining, employee involvement climate, and their interaction effects change customer perceptions of service quality in the context of quick-service restaurants. The importance of these findings extends both the undermining literature and employee involvement literature. These tasks were accomplished by finding direct relationships among supervisor undermining and customer perceptions of service quality, employee involvement climate and customer perceptions of service quality, and the moderating effect that supervisor undermining had in the relationship between employee involvement climates and customer perceptions of service quality. The interaction that occurs within work units is especially salient because in low employee involvement climates, supervisor undermining has a minimal effect in determining performance. Conversely, in high employee involvement climates, supervisor undermining makes a large impact on store performance.

Why this occurred can be attributed to the Pelz effect (Pelz, 1951). The Pelz effect maintains that employees' job satisfaction increases when the supervisor has an upward influence in the organization. Conversely, when a noninfluential supervisor takes action little impact is made on job satisfaction (Anderson, Tolson, Fields, & Thacker, 1989). Anderson, Tolson, Fields, and Thacker (1990) further explain "that a leader's upward or hierarchical influence within the organization will moderate that leader's downward behavior toward group members in relation to members' satisfaction and attitudes" (p. 19).

In this situation, when an influential supervisor abuses the manager, employee involvement climates become important in determining performance. In a low involvement climate, in which an influential supervisor cannot withhold or harm any of the PIRK variables (because PIRK is low), supervisor undermining will make little difference on service quality. However, in a high involvement climate, a supervisor undermining a manager can make a large difference in perceptions of service quality. On the same stream, if a supervisor does not undermine a manager, the high involvement climate will produce superior results. Therefore, the influential supervisor will only have a negative undermining effect on the restaurants in which involvement climate is high. As mentioned previously, the undermining behaviors that the supervisor engages in are likely to be modeled by other managers and in turn employees within the units. This phenomenon, attributed to social learning theory, can help explain how these behaviors are spread and passed on to the consumer. The combination of the Pelz effect and the modeling behaviors are both likely to contribute to the climate and the level in which PIRK is felt as a group.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present study extends theoretical knowledge on employee involvement by verifying that employee involvement climate contributes to customer perceptions of service quality in the context of quick-service restaurants. Additionally, this research extends the supervisor undermining theoretical knowledge by adding an additional operationalization of performance, thus demonstrating that supervisor undermining has the potential to create negative consequences for a restaurant's customers. This important finding shows that not only can undermining affect the individual and those close to the individual but also can make an impact on the end user in short service encounters as well.

Practically, restaurants should note that due to moderator effects in low employee involvement climates supervisor undermining makes little difference but makes a great difference in those climates that are high in employee involvement. Therefore, employee involvement training can and should be taken to improve the climate for improved organizational performance. However, with an increased employee involvement climate, supervisor undermining becomes a critical link, and decreasing this hostile behavior should become a focus on restaurant's efforts for improved employee treatment and retention. Increasing longevity within organizations by fostering a high employee involvement climate with low supervisor undermining is a task that service organizations should seek to accomplish through training and interventions.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations that occurred in this study. First, the sample consisted of restaurant managers. Combining other levels within the organization that evaluate both supervisor undermining and employee involvement climate would create a more complete picture of the restaurant as a whole. However, the present study was unable to use front-line employees. Similarly, the lack of triangulation also limits the findings. Obtaining performance evaluations of the individuals by their superior would provide additional insight into the study. The lack of information on the size of the restaurants based on number of employees was also a limitation. Methodologically, the reliability of the mystery shop showed limitations. The fact that the time of day and information about the server could not be obtained may limit the reliability, despite the large number of mystery shops. Last, the cross-sectional design limits the causal connections made between the variables of interest. Future research should measure both involvement and undermining overtime to increase internal validity.

Future research should address the limitation of the current study and apply its concepts in differing contexts. As previously mentioned, restaurants are unique so using different contexts within hospitality will extend reliability of the current findings. DiPietro and Pizam (2008) state that alienation in quick-service restaurants is a cause of managerial styles and practices within the unit. Future research should examine if supervisor undermining is related to alienation in restaurants and the resulting outcomes alienation has on service quality. Additionally, future research should examine how coworker undermining affects the relationship tested, in particular with front-line employees.

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