



# An approach to employees' job performance through work environmental variables and leadership behaviours

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines how the combined effects of work environmental factors and leadership behaviours lead to the presence (or absence) of industrial employees job performance by applying fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). A sample composed of supervisor-subordinate dyads was used to test the propositions of this study. The results show that the most important variables are transformational leadership and social support. Employee empowerment and task significance seem to play a secondary role in leading to employee job performance. These findings support the need for managers to use positive leadership to manage human resources. This paper contributes to the advancement of the knowledge of employee job performance through the identification of the combinations of conditions that can lead to the presence or absence of this important organizational outcome. Directions for future studies are commented on at the end of the paper.

## 1. Introduction

Job performance is probably the most important and studied variable in industrial management and organizational behaviour (Carpini, Parker, & Griffin, 2017). It can be defined as individual behaviour-something that people do and can be observed-that generates value for the organization (Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993) and contributes to the organization's goals (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). Job performance can also be understood as an achievement-related behaviour with some evaluative component (Motowild, Borman, & Schmit, 1997), that is, the extent to which an employee meets general organizational performance expectations (Afzali, Arash-Motahari, & Hatami-Shirkouhi, 2014).

Over the last decades, the meaning of job performance has varied considerably, from the more traditional view focused on employment and fixed tasks to a broader understanding of work roles in dynamic organizational contexts (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). The fundamental reason for this focus shift is to the highly competitive and global work environment, where all organizations must be oriented to respond to dynamic and changing situations (Baard, Rench, & Kozlowski, 2014). This new context requires a broader conceptualization of job performance that brings together all the potential behaviours that positively

contribute to the achievement of organizational goals (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). The new conceptualization of individual performance includes in-role performance (e.g., Williams & Anderson, 1991), adaptive performance (e.g., Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010), proactive performance (e.g., Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006) and citizenship behaviours (e.g., Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Delving into this new conceptualization of job performance, Griffin et al. (2007) developed an integrative performance model that cross-classifies 'the three levels at which role behaviours can contribute to effectiveness (individual, team, and organization) and the three different forms of behaviour (proficiency, adaptivity, and proactivity) into subdimensions of work role performance' (p. 330). Although previous research recommends taking advantage of the existing commonalities between the different job performance constructs (Carpini & Parker, 2017), this study is limited to the individual-level behaviours that generate value for organizations. Specifically, this research is focused on job performance related to individual task proficiency. The reason is that this study was carried out in the industrial sector, a highly automated sector where task proficiency is still very relevant to achieve optimal overall performance. Without individual performance, there is no team performance, organizational performance, or economic sector performance (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015). Therefore, individual task

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proficiency is a type of job performance that refers to behaviours that ‘can be formalized and are not embedded in a social context’ and ‘reflect the degree to which an employee meets the known expectations and requirements of his or her roles as an individual’ (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 331). These behaviours represent the essence of so-called ‘in-role behaviours’ (Katz, 1964), ‘job role behaviours’ (Welbourne, Johnson, & Erez, 1998) and ‘task performance’ (Johnson, 2003). When this study refers to job performance, it is with this meaning.

Previous research has shown that optimal individual performance leads to business success and affects the profitability of an organization (Bevan, 2012). In contrast, inefficient job performance is commonly associated with lower productivity, profitability, and organizational effectiveness (Okoyo & Ezejiofor, 2013). Therefore, to improve job performance, it is crucial to identify different factors that can positively influence it.

Although the study of the variable job performance appears to have already reached a stage of maturity at a theoretical level, as it is one of the most analysed (Campbell & Wiernik, 2015), this is not the case. There are relatively few systematic attempts to comprehensively define the nature of job performance, and there are also few studies that have managed to specify the processes through which individual behaviours can generate organizational value (Carpini et al., 2017). In this sense, previous research has recognized that job performance heavily depends on how employees perceive their jobs (Grant, 2008); therefore, industrial sector managers should try to increase job performance by focusing more on people and not so much on tasks and create a supportive and collaborative work environment (Randall, Cropanzano, Bormann, & Birjulin, 1999). To test the influence of people-oriented management on job performance, this study aims to analyse how the combined effects of five different antecedents related to the work environment (task significance, social support from co-workers and supervisors) and leadership behaviours (transformational leadership and empowerment) lead to the presence (or absence) of employee job performance. Previous research has demonstrated the positive relationship between some of the variables considered in this study and job performance, for example, task significance (e.g., Grant, 2008; Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), social support (e.g., Shanock, & Eisenberger, 2006), transformational leadership (e.g., Judge & Piccolo, 2004) or empowerment (e.g., Koberg, Boss, Senjem, & Goodman, 1999). However, no research has analysed the combined effect of all these variables on job performance, which is crucial since all the conditions considered in this study are present (or absent) in organizations, and it is precisely their combination that can lead to higher or lower levels of job performance. The use of fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) can help provide a better understanding of the combinations of conditions that lead to job performance in the industrial sector, offering an alternative approach that complements conventional practice (Ragin, 2008).

The results contribute to the advancement of knowledge in this field by providing a more complete vision of the individual job performance in the industrial sector by considering antecedents related, not only to the task itself as might be expected in this sector, but to the creation of an optimal interpersonal climate in which the work acquires an important meaning for the workers and where the leadership style enhances their capacities and abilities. Furthermore, the results of this study thereby provide industrial managers with information on strategies that can be designed and adopted to promote job performance from a person-oriented perspective.

The article is divided into several sections. Section 2 presents a review of the general literature with a focus on the links between job performance and the five antecedents considered in the study, including the model propositions to be tested. Section 3 describes the data, method, measurement scales and procedure followed in this study. Section 4 presents the results of the analysis. Section 5 discusses these results, framing them in the existing literature. Section 6 briefly outlines the conclusions of the study and managerial implications.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Job performance and work environmental factors

Previous studies have proven that work design affects job performance (Humphrey et al., 2007; Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017). The concept of job design includes aspects related to ‘the content and organization of one’s work tasks, activities, relationships and responsibilities’ (Parker, 2014, p. 662), and it has been recognized as a key antecedent of job performance (Parker et al., 2017). From the contemporary perspective of job design, Grant, Fried and Juillerat (2011) consider four types of work characteristics: task, knowledge, social, and work context. Task characteristics in turn include autonomy, task variety, task significance, task identity, and job feedback, that is, the dimensions analysed by the job characteristics model (JCM, Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Knowledge characteristics include job complexity, information processing, problem solving, skill variety, and specialization. Social characteristics include social support, interdependence, interaction outside the organization, and feedback from others. Finally, work context characteristics include ergonomics, physical demands, work conditions, and equipment. Although all work environmental characteristics are important, this study focuses on the analysis of task significance (task characteristics) and social support (social characteristics) as important factors to improve employee job performance. Previous research has recognized the existence of a positive relationship between task significance and job performance (e.g., Grant, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2007) and between social support and job performance (e.g., Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

Task significance describes the ‘degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether in the immediate organization or in the external environment’ (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p. 257). This perception is especially relevant today, as employees are increasingly concerned about doing work that benefits other people and contributes to society (Colby, Sippola, & Phelps, 2001). Task significance can be analysed within the framework of goal setting theory (GST). According to this theory, encouraging people to pursue clear and difficult goals produces greater performance benefits than encouraging them to pursue vague and easy goals or simply encouraging them to do their best work (Locke, Latham, Smith, Wook, & Bandura, 1990). Therefore, in the context of GST, task significance can be seen primarily as a determinant of goal commitment (Locke & Latham, 2002). Workers who feel that their work has a positive impact on other people will dedicate more time and energy to carrying it out, which in turn will improve their job performance (Juliani & Purba, 2019). In contrast, the lack of task significance is one of the main reasons that leads employees to disengage from their jobs (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, emphasizing task significance can be particularly important to achieve higher levels of job performance, especially in the industrial sector, which is often limited in material incentives.

Considering the previous reasoning, once perceptions of task significance are cultivated, employees are more likely to perform their tasks effectively (Grant, 2008; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). However, there are mixed results when considering the type or intensity of the influence of task significance on job performance. Previous studies have failed to establish a strong relationship between task importance and job performance, establishing only weak relationships (Humphrey et al., 2007). Other studies have revealed that in some cases increasing the social importance of routine tasks can hinder the performance of individual tasks, making it difficult to achieve set goals and generating greater anxiety and pressure on the worker to achieve higher job performance (performance pressure) (Anderson & Stritch, 2016). In contrast, several studies have shown a strong and direct relationship between task significance and job performance (Grant, 2008) or an indirect relationship through other variables, such as individual dispositions (Peiró, Bayona, Caballer, & Di Fabio, 2020), work engagement (Grobela, 2019) or passion for work (Juliani & Purba, 2019). In this

sense, the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) proposes that task significance, together with the variety of skills and the identity of the task, can generate meaningfulness at work, which in turn leads to higher employee job performance (Humphrey et al., 2007).

Considering the mixed findings of previous empirical research, it is necessary to clarify the role that task significance plays in achieving employee job performance. Thus, the following proposition is tested:

P1: The presence of task significance leads to the presence of employee job performance.

Another important work environment characteristic in the work design is social support, which is included in the social characteristics proposed by Grant et al. (2011). Social support can be defined as the possibility of accessing helping relationships and the quality of those relationships (Leavy, 1983). This social support emanates from multiple sources, such as supervisors, coworkers, and organizations. Perceived supervisor support (or coworkers) can be defined as employees' beliefs about the degree to which the quality of helping relationships derived from supervisors (or coworkers) is available (Kim, Hur, Moon, & Jun 2017). Previous research has paid less attention to support from coworkers than support provided by supervisors or organizations (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). According to Pérez-Bilbao & Martín-Daza (1997), social support from supervisors is especially relevant in jobs in which interaction with colleagues is limited, while support from coworkers is more important in positions that require teamwork.

It seems clear that supervisors and coworkers play different roles in supporting employees. What seems to be less clear is the relationship between workers' perception of social support from coworkers and supervisors and job performance. The literature on job performance has argued that the success of supervisors is largely determined by the productivity of their employees (Oh & Berry, 2009). Therefore, according to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), when subordinates feel supported by their supervisors, they perform better and are more committed to them (Frear, Donsbach, Theilgard & Shanock, 2018). In the same way, when coworkers support each other, they are more willing to help each other because they know their colleagues are likely to reciprocate their help in the future (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Although this idea seems reasonable, few studies have analysed the direct relationship between social support from supervisors and the performance of job duties (e.g., Carter, Armenakis, Field, & Mossholder, 2013; Frear et al., 2018; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006), and far fewer have analysed the relationship between social support from coworkers and job performance (Beehr, Jex, Stacy, & Murray, 2008). In fact, most studies have analysed the mediating or moderating roles of social support among certain variables and job performance (Kim et al., 2017; Tremblay & Simard, 2018). Tremblay and Simard (2018) concluded a direct and positive relationship between social support from coworkers and supervisors and job performance, establishing that social support from coworkers is a stronger predictor of task performance than social support from supervisors. These authors also concluded that social support from coworkers and supervisors may elicit greater motivation for in-role performance than organizational support.

Therefore, to fill the gap in the literature on social support about the role of coworker and supervisor social support on employee job performance, this study considers them separately and proposes the following:

P2: The presence of supervisor social support leads to the presence of employee job performance.

P3: The presence of coworker social support leads to the presence of employee job performance.

## 2.2. Job performance and leadership behaviours

In a global and highly competitive environment where all

organizations must be oriented to respond to dynamic and changing situations (Baard et al., 2014), traditional leadership styles give way to leadership styles based on dialogue, cooperation, and the use of procedures that awaken the self-efficacy and adaptability of the employees (Wood, Atkins, & Tabernero, 2000). In this context, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) serves as a basis for understanding the relationships developed between superiors and their subordinates. Thus, the leader gives benefits to subordinates through transformational leadership and empowerment strategies, and subordinates in turn increase responsiveness to the leader by aligning their behaviour and performance in accordance with supervisory preferences (Gao, Murphy, & Anderson, 2020; Keller & Dansereau, 1995). In this sense, transformational leadership and empowerment emerge as two people-oriented strategies that have proven to be effective in increasing subordinates' job performance (e.g., Koberg et al., 1999; Ng, 2017).

Transformational leadership dominates current thinking about leadership research (Ng, 2017). It is a behaviour-based approach to leadership that explains how leaders encourage performance above expectations in followers (Dionne et al., 2012). Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009) define transformational leaders as 'leader behaviours that transform and inspire followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization' (p. 423). Transformational leaders go beyond simple exchanges with followers and seek to achieve superior results through different influencing processes, such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1990). These processes of influence imply that leaders become role models for their followers (idealized influence); motivate and inspire them by providing meaning and challenges in their work (inspirational motivation); encourage their followers to be innovative and creative to solve the problems that arise (intellectual stimulation); and act as guides or tutors for their followers, paying special attention to the individual needs of each follower to ensure proper development and growth (individualized consideration). Taken together, it seems clear that this leadership style is expected to motivate followers to perform at higher levels (Ng, 2017; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011). Followers of transformational leaders are more productive, regardless of whether performance is measured at the individual, team, unit, or organizational level (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015). In fact, several authors have concluded a positive and direct relationship between transformational leadership and employee job performance (Buil, Martínez, & Matute, 2019; Hongdao, Bibi, Khan, Ardito, & Nurunnabi, 2019; Wang et al., 2001) and an indirect relationship through several mediating mechanisms. A meta-analysis carried out by Ng (2017) revealed that transformational leadership affects task performance both directly and through mediating variables such as job satisfaction, job self-efficacy, work engagement, leader identification, organizational identification, leader-member exchange, and distributive justice.

Considering previous empirical research and taking into account that task performance refers to completing prescribed tasks, a transformational leader who provides subordinates with clear direction is expected to foster higher job performance (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Therefore, the following proposition is tested:

P4: Transformational leadership leads to the presence of job performance.

Another important variable related to leadership behaviours is empowerment. There are two general perspectives of empowerment in the organizational context: the social-structural perspective (Kanter, 1977) and the psychological perspective (Spreitzer, 1997). Empowerment from the social-structural perspective relates to sharing formal authority and the control of organizational resources, as well as the ability to make relevant decisions within the scope and domain of employees' work by delegating responsibility throughout the organizational chain of command (Spreitzer, 2008). The psychological

perspective of empowerment focuses on the employee and states that empowerment is achieved when the psychological states of the employees produce a perception of empowerment (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). Previous research suggests that to achieve effective empowerment in the organization, both perspectives must be considered (Matthews, Diaz, & Cole, 2003), as the present study does.

A generally accepted conclusion in the scientific literature is that an empowered workforce will lead to competitive advantage (Quinn & Spreitzer, 1997). Empowerment can act as a motivator to energize, direct and sustain employee behaviours that are ultimately associated with job performance (Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009). Previous research has proven the positive relationship between empowerment and job performance (Afzali et al., 2014; Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Chen and colleagues (2007) showed that team empowerment positively affects team performance and that individual empowerment affects individual performance. The results of the study by Afzali et al. (2014) showed the positive influence of empowerment (psychological empowerment) on employee job performance. The authors maintain that ‘psychological empowerment increases the effort, intensity of effort, persistence, and flexibility of employees, which consequently leads to high job performance’ (p. 627). The meta-analysis carried out by Seibert et al. (2011) also supported the influence of psychological empowerment (team empowerment) on individual job performance (team performance).

In sum, empowered employees tend to perform well because they make an effort to complete job tasks, take initiative in their work, and persist through challenges (Ehrnrooth & Björkman, 2012; Maynard, Luciano, D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Dean, 2014). Thus, the following proposition is tested:

P5: The presence of empowerment leads to the presence of employee job performance.

### 3. Method

QCA makes it possible to establish asymmetrical configurations (causal conditions and/or combinations of them) that apply the principle of equifinality, which means that different combinations of conditions can lead to the same outcome (Roig-Tierno, Huang, & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2016). Of the different types of QCA, fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA) enables various degrees of categorization of the conditions and is a suitable method when studying causally complex social phenomena that can be articulated as groups and explained in terms of necessity and sufficiency (Woodside, 2016). This method is particularly suitable for studying small and medium-sized samples (Fiss, 2011), such as the one in this study. The fsQCA method was applied following the steps proposed by Schneider and Wagemann (2010) – that is, calibration, analysis of necessity and analysis of sufficiency.

#### 3.1. Participants and procedure

Ten small and medium companies from the industrial sector were contacted in Galicia, Spain. Specifically, companies from the dairy industry (40%), canning industry (30%) and bread, cake, and pastry industry, including frozen baking products (30%), agreed to participate in this research. Using a convenience sample, 87 questionnaires were distributed, and 73 were received from worker-supervisor dyads (16 supervisors and 73 subordinates; 4.56 subordinates per supervisor on average). Some of the characteristics of the jobs included in the study were high automation and unique and clearly identified front-line managers. Confidentiality of responses was assured before collecting the data through a self-administered online questionnaire from September 2018 to April 2019.

The supervisor sample was predominantly composed of men (75%), with a mean age of 42.4 years. The entire sample had a permanent contract with their organizations, and they belonged to the dairy

industry (50%), canning industry (18.8%), and bread, cake, and pastry industry (31.2%). The mean organizational tenure was 161.8 months, and the mean job tenure was 128.5 months. Among subordinates, most were men (63%), with a mean age of 38.6 years. The mean organizational tenure was 100.6 months, and the mean job tenure was 89.3 months. They belonged to the dairy industry (49.3%), canning industry (19.2%), and bread, cake, and pastry industry (31.5%). While subordinates provided scores for their supervisors’ leadership styles, psychosocial risk factors (coworkers’ social support, supervisors’ social support and task significance) and empowerment perceptions, supervisors were asked to rate the employee job performance. Therefore, predictor and criterion variables were collected from different sources (subordinates and supervisors), thus minimizing measurement bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

#### 3.2. Instruments and calibration

**Job performance.** Supervisors provided ratings of in-role performance using a 7-item scale devised by Williams and Anderson (1991) ( $JP \alpha = 0.86$ ). Supervisors were asked to answer about the subordinates’ job performance in relation to the formal job requirements, considering the performance they had during the previous year. This scale includes behaviours recognized by formal reward systems and which are part of the requirements outlined in job descriptions. The scale items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and includes items such as ‘Performs tasks that are expected of him or her’ or ‘Meets formal performance requirements of the job’.

**Task significance and social support.** The CoPsoQ-Istas21 method was used for the evaluation and prevention of work environmental factors (Moncada, Llorens, Andrés, Moreno, & Molinero, 2014). In this paper, three dimensions were analysed on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 (*always/to a very great extent*) to 5 (*never/not at all*). Those dimensions were task significance (TS 3 items,  $\alpha = 0.74$ ), coworker social support (CSS 3 items,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ), and supervisor social support (SSS 3 items,  $\alpha = 0.91$ ). The dimensions include items such as ‘Do the tasks you do seem important to you?’ (task significance), ‘Do you receive help and support from your colleagues in carrying out your work?’ (coworker social support), and ‘Do you receive help and support from your boss in carrying out your work?’ (supervisor social support).

**Transformational leadership.** The 7-item scale by Carless, Wearing and Mann (2000) was used to measure transformational leadership (TL  $\alpha = 0.92$ ). The items describe the subordinate’s perception of transformational leadership carried out by his or her supervisor on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*frequently, if not always*). The scale includes items such as ‘Treats staff as individuals, supports and encourages their development’ or ‘Instills pride and respect in others and inspires me by being highly competent’.

**Empowerment.** A self-report measure of empowerment (EW) based on a 19-item scale by Matthews and colleagues (2003) was used. The scale measures the employee’s perception of empowerment ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ). The scale items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and included items such as ‘Employees have a say in changing company policies’ or ‘Employees have a say in defining their job responsibilities’.

After evaluating the psychometric properties of the scales, calibration was used to transform the data into fuzzy sets. Three anchors were established for calibration: full membership, maximum ambiguity, and full nonmembership (Ragin, 2008), with thresholds at the 90th, 50th, and 10th percentiles, respectively (Kraus, Richter, Brem, Cheng, & Chang, 2016).

### 4. Results

The outcome of the model was the presence of employees’ job performance. The five conditions were task significance, coworker social



support, supervisor social support, transformational leadership, and empowerment. To conduct a more thorough analysis and provide greater insight into the proposed model, the analysis was conducted considering both the presence and absence of employee job performance. Table 1 shows the results of the analysis of necessary conditions for the presence (and absence) of job performance among industrial workers.

The results indicate that none of the five conditions considered herein on their own lead to the presence of job performance. However, the presence of transformational leadership or empowerment or supervisor social support emerged as a necessary condition for the presence of employee job performance (consistency = 0.92). Furthermore, the absence of both social support from coworkers and supervisors (consistency = 0.86) was a quasi-necessary condition for the presence of employee job performance (consistency value close to 0.90) (Schneider, Schulze-Bentrop, & Paunescu, 2010). Similarly, the presence of social support from coworkers or social support from supervisors (consistency = 0.88) was a quasi-necessary condition for the absence of employee job performance (Table 2).

An analysis of sufficient conditions was also conducted to identify causal configurations that lead to the outcome, again considering the presence and absence of employee job performance. The following models were studied:

$$JP = f(TS, CSS, SSS, TL, EW)$$

$$\sim JP = f(TS, CSS, SSS, TL, EW)$$

Intermediate solutions are presented for both models in Table 3. Four solutions lead to the presence of job performance among industrial workers, which explains more than 64% of the analysed cases. The results also reveal four solutions that lead to the absence of job performance, which explain more than 58% of the cases in this study.

### 5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to study employee job performance through three environmental variables (task significance, coworker social support, and supervisor social support) and two leadership behaviours (transformational leadership and empowerment). The results show that no condition on its own is necessary for the presence (or absence) of job performance. However, the joint analysis of the conditions related to employee perception of supervisor behaviour reveals that the presence of transformational leadership or empowerment or supervisor social support is a necessary condition for the presence of the job performance. This result corroborates previous studies that showed the importance of transformational leadership (Ng, 2017), empowerment (Seibert et al., 2011) and supervisor social support (Frear et al., 2018) on job performance. Therefore, if any of these three conditions are present, good job performance should be achieved. Moreover, the absence of coworker

**Table 1**  
Analysis of necessary conditions (absence/presence of job performance).

Conditions	JP		~JP	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
CSS	0.478500	0.518642	0.650128	0.680426
~CSS	0.705158	0.676090	0.540077	0.500000
SSS	0.407862	0.408113	0.784989	0.758451
~SSS	0.758598	0.785124	0.387405	0.387158
TS	0.538083	0.558673	0.590968	0.592474
~TS	0.607493	0.606005	0.559797	0.539216
TL	0.710867	0.718187	0.480917	0.469274
~TL	0.474815	0.486469	0.711197	0.703587
EW	0.691031	0.654070	0.601782	0.550000
~EW	0.524569	0.577027	0.621502	0.660135

Note: CSS – Coworkers social support; SSS – Supervisor social support; TS – Task significance, TL – Transformational leadership; EW – Empowerment.

**Table 2**  
Analysis of joint necessary conditions (absence/presence of job performance).

Outcome	Conditions	Consistency	Coverage
JP	TL + SSS + EW	0.924447	0.547671
JP	~SSS*~CSS	0.861792	0.664299
~JP	SSS + CSS	0.886134	0.682509

Note: (~) means absence of the condition; (+) is the logical operator ‘OR’.  
\*indicates AND.

social support or supervisor social support is a quasi-necessary condition for the presence of job performance; in the same way, the presence of any kind of social support is a quasi-necessary condition for the absence of employee job performance. This result is conclusive, although contrary to what was expected, since most researchers have established a positive relationship between social support and job performance (Beehr et al., 2008; Frear et al., 2018). From these results, it can be concluded that the presence of social support does not necessarily lead to job performance, as long as employees perceive that transformational leadership or empowerment is present. In this same sense, some studies have revealed an inverse effect of social support on other outcome variables, such as job stress or well-being (Kickul & Posig, 2001), showing that too much social support does not necessarily create positive work-related outcomes (McIntosh, 1991). In fact, a recent study concluded an inverse effect of social support on the relationship between emotional labour and employee job performance (Kim et al., 2017). Specifically, they concluded that when social support from superiors was high, worker performance decreased, and when social support was low, there was an increase in worker performance. This can mean that supervisors’ excessive attention to workers could be interpreted by them as mistrust in their performance, causing support to play an inverse role than expected. In this specific work context, jobs are highly automated, and routine tasks are highly structured; therefore, as Kim and his colleagues maintain (2017), support from superiors and colleagues could be unnecessary, even counterproductive, for improving employee job performance. Workers might perceive that social support is mainly justified by the fact that the supervisor does not trust their performance despite the years they have been working in the same position; therefore, far from becoming a source of support, it becomes a source of stress (Wilk & Moynihan, 2005). Furthermore, people with a high level of knowledge about the way of performing their tasks probably need a certain level of independence and decisional autonomy. In this sense, pressuring subordinates to reconsider the way they do their jobs can be quite irritating and ineffective for workers with a great need for independence (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996). These results are confirmed by the sufficiency analysis, where supervisor social support is revealed as a very relevant variable, since its absence is noted in all configurations that lead to employee job performance (as a core condition), and the presence of supervisor social support is present in all configurations that lead to the absence of employee job performance (also as a core condition). Something similar happens with coworker social support, since its absence is present in two of the four configurations that lead to the presence of employee job performance, and the presence of coworker social support is present in two of the four configurations that lead to the absence of employee job performance. The results also show that the presence of coworker social support leads to the presence of employee job performance and that its absence leads to the absence of employee job performance in one configuration in each case. These results are in line with the proposition raised in this study and with previous studies, where social support from coworkers was revealed as a stronger predictor of task performance than social support from supervisors (Tremblay & Simard, 2018).

Continuing with the analysis of sufficient conditions, the results show four configurations that lead to the presence and four configurations that lead to the absence of employee job performance. The first configuration that leads to the presence of employee job performance

**Table 3**  
Analysis of sufficient conditions.

	JP				~JP			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Coworkers social support	○		○	●	○	●		●
Supervisor social support	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●
Task significance		●	○	●	●	○	●	●
Transformational leadership			●	●	○		○	○
Empowerment	●	●				●	●	●
Consistency (incl.)	0.9204	0.9418	0.9066	0.9343	0.8158	0.8262	0.8522	0.8708
Raw coverage (cov.r)	0.5116	0.3581	0.3876	0.2623	0.3549	0.2569	0.2824	0.3174
Unique coverage (cov.u)	0.0350	0.0061	0.0399	0.0307	0.1113	0.0483	−0.0000	−0.0000
Solution coverage:	0.6431				0.5852			
Solution consistency:	0.8933				0.8440			

Note: denotes the presence of the condition and ○ denotes the absence of the condition. Large circles denote core conditions, and small circles denote peripheral conditions (Fiss, 2011). Consistency cut-off: 0.881 and 0.809. Frequency cut-off: 1.00. Vector of expected directions (1,1,1,1,1) and (0,0,0,0,0) (Ragin & Sean, 2016).

refers to the presence of empowerment, even if employees do not perceive that they are supported by their supervisors or coworkers. The second configuration also refers to the presence of empowerment and task significance, even if the supervisor social support is not present. The third configuration refers to the presence of transformational leadership, even if task significance and support from supervisors and colleagues are absent. The last configuration also refers to the presence of transformational leadership, task significance, and coworker social support, even if social support from supervisors is absent. The sufficient configurations that lead to the absence of employee job performance show that transformational leadership is also a key variable since its absence is present in three of the four configurations identified during the analysis, corroborating the results obtained in the presence model. Employees' empowerment is present in three of the fourth configurations, which leads us to conclude that empowerment is not a key condition since it is always present, both in the presence and the absence models. The social support of supervisors and coworkers also plays a fundamental role in leading to the absence of employee job performance, although in the opposite sense as expected, since their presence leads to the absence of job performance in most of the configurations analysed. This corroborates the stressful role that social support can occasionally play (Wilk & Moynihan, 2005) in highly automated and structured jobs (Kahya, 2007), especially when this support comes from supervisors.

The joint results of the necessary and sufficient analyses point to transformational leadership as one of the most important variables leading to employee job performance. Transformational leaders motivate their followers to fulfil their assigned job duties, linking followers' job roles with a compelling vision of the future of the organization (Wang et al., 2011). This link leads followers of transformational leaders to see their work more meaningful, which in turn leads to an increase in their intrinsic motivational potential (Zhu, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2009). Transformational leaders also instil in their followers the belief that they can achieve any goal, thus serving as effective mentors by providing them with the support and tools they need to get their work done (individualized consideration, Bass & Avolio, 1990). In this study, it can be inferred that transformational leadership makes up for the absence of specific social support from supervisors. The same reasoning can be applied to employees' empowerment. Transformational leaders encourage their followers to be innovative and creative when they question assumptions, reformulate problems, and come up with new ideas and solutions (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). These leaders try to involve followers in the search for solutions to the problems that arise (intellectual stimulation, Bass & Avolio, 1990). In fact, empowered followers are often presented as one of the main characteristics that distinguish transformational from transactional leadership, which does not seek to empower followers but simply to influence their behaviours (Kark, Shamir, & Chen, 2003). Therefore, transformational leadership

could be understood as an 'umbrella' concept that includes social support and empowerment; that is, the presence of transformational leadership leads the other two conditions to play a less important role. Once again, the explanation for this result can be justified by the characteristics of the study sample. The study was carried out among workers with more than ten years of job tenure in a highly automated and standardized work environment with perfectly defined and structured tasks. The specific characteristics of this work context can lead workers to think that their participation in decision-making processes is intrinsic to their job and derived from their job experience and know-how. If so, workers would not perceive empowerment as such, and their performance would not be affected either positively or negatively by it. In the same line of reasoning, social support from both supervisors and coworkers can become an unnecessary or even counterproductive factor, as mentioned. As a result, and given the characteristics of the tasks, it might be asked if leadership could be considered equally unnecessary (Eva, Sendjaya, Prajogo, & Madison, 2021) since the subordinates and the organization can perfectly act as substitutes of leadership according to the model proposed by Kerr and Jermier (1978). According to this approach and to improve leadership effectiveness, it is necessary to identify situational variables that can substitute, neutralize, or enhance the effects of a leader's behaviour. These variables could be related to the characteristics of the subordinates, the task to be carried out, and the organization. Among the characteristics of the subordinates would be the ability, the experience or the need for independence; among the characteristics of the tasks to be carried out would be the feedback, and the distinction between routine, methodologically invariant tasks and the intrinsically satisfactory tasks; and among the characteristics of the organization would be the level of formalization or the social support. In this contingent conception, leadership styles such as transformational or charismatic styles arise (Dionne, Yammarino, Howell, & Villa, 2005). However, Podsakoff et al. (1996) have not found support for this universal assumption that substitutes of leadership moderate the impact of transformational leadership on subordinates' performance. Despite this result, they admit that it would be a mistake to ignore these substitutes, since the leader can have a greater impact on employees' performance by being able to influence them not only directly but also indirectly through the work context setting. Therefore, the importance of transformational leadership in this study transcends the effect that the subordinates experience, the task design, or the organization structure can exert on employees' performance, becoming it the most important variable to motivate them to perform at high levels (Ng, 2017; Wang et al., 2011).

Finally, the presence of task significance is not a decisive condition leading to the presence of employee job performance, since it is present in some configurations and absent in others, both in the presence and absence models. The explanation for this finding may be rooted in the

very nature of the tasks performed and the seniority of the employees in the workplace. Although when workers start in a new job, the task significance is probably relevant to generate meaningfulness that in turn leads to higher employee job performance (Hu, Luo, Chen, & Zhong, 2020), it is also probable that the perceived relevance of tasks may decrease over time. The fact that in this study, workers have been working for more than ten years in the same position can justify this result, which is in line with previous studies that have established a weak relationship between task significance and job performance (Humphrey et al., 2007).

In summary, the results of the empirical analysis support proposition P4. Although propositions P2 and P3 are not supported because it is the absence rather than the presence of social support from coworkers and supervisors that leads to the presence of employee job performance, a very interesting and new discussion line opens up to new research. Propositions P1 and P5 are partially supported since the presence of task significance and empowerment leads to both the presence and the absence of employee job performance.

## 6. Conclusions and managerial implications

This study examined possible configurations that can lead to employee job performance through the combination of both work environmental variables and leadership behaviours. The findings of this study provide important information for practitioners to design people-oriented management practices focused on helping industrial companies increase employee job performance by creating collaborative and supportive work environments (Randall et al., 1999).

The results revealed that in a task-oriented sector, the industrial sector, engaging in people-oriented management practices through transformational leadership can be an optimal formula to lead to employee job performance. Therefore, managers must promote training programmes for leaders to adopt the principles of transformational leadership and become inspirational figures for their subordinates in the achievement of challenging performance objectives. To this end, managers must cultivate a high-quality exchange with their subordinates, recognizing their achievements, involving them in decision-making processes, providing them with constructive feedback, and granting them good development opportunities. It is likely that following more people-oriented rather than task-oriented management practices, the subordinates respond with a higher performance rate (Ng, 2017). As mentioned, supervisors must know how to bring out the best of each employee considering that, when managing workers who have been in highly automated jobs for many years, these workers are more likely to need a guide or role model than a task supervisor. The latter could mean that the organization does not trust the experience of the workers, causing them stress and frustration (Kahya, 2007; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005). Therefore, it is important to have leaders who guide, accompany, empower, and act as mentors, enhancing the capacities and abilities of the followers by giving them enough space to carry out their tasks in accordance with recognized standards. Furthermore, organizations must design intervention programs capable of improving the leadership styles of their supervisors or select and promote those people whose individual profile is capable of developing transformational leaderships (Wang et al., 2011).

One of the main contributions of this study is to report the combined effects of work environment variables and leadership behaviours on employee job performance in the industrial sector. The characteristics of this sector can help understand the key role that transformational leadership plays when talking about job performance, since it is capable of blurring the positive effect of empowerment and social support on employee performance, acting as an ‘umbrella’ factor of these two conditions. The second practical contribution of this study is the inverse effect of social support on employee job performance. This contribution confirms that too much social support does not necessarily generate positive work-related results, especially when the seniority and

experience of employees is high, and the tasks are highly structured and automated. Fu, Flood, Rousseau, and Morris (2021) state that not all help is equally valuable, so it is advisable for managers to provide coaching on how to avoid dysfunctional consequences of support.

The current study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. One of the main limitations of the study is the generalizability of the results to other work settings. These findings were obtained from workers with high job tenure and experience in highly automated jobs; therefore, it might be that in other jobs of greater complexity or lesser structuration of tasks, the impact of the selected variables on employees’ performance was different. Future research could be conducted in other work settings to strengthen the generalization of the present findings. Future research could also analyse the mediating or moderating role of empowerment and social support in the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance, since transformational leadership seems to have blurred the direct relationships that predictably exist between empowerment or social support and job performance. Finally, this study analysed task performance (in-role behaviours), so future research could consider other outcome variables, such as contextual performance (extra-role behaviours).

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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