

# **Labour relationship quality perceptions and self-esteem of a sample of Tshwane-based employees**

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## **Abstract**

Significant relationships between general self-esteem of employees and a variety of positive and negative organisational behaviour phenomena have been widely reported in the literature. The subsequent expectation was that significant relationships would exist between primary labour relationship quality (PLQ) perceptions of employees, and their self-esteem (SE) levels. The author also anticipated the existence of significant differences in the PLQ perceptions of employees with lower and higher SE levels.

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken and 454 sample members participated in a questionnaire survey. Inferential statistical analysis of data confirmed the existence of a statistically significant relationship between PLQ perceptions and SE levels of employees in the sample group. Statistical analysis results also confirmed that sample members with lower and higher SE levels held considerably different perceptions of general PLQ, as well as different perceptions of the levels of trust, compliance, fairness and good faith in primary employment relationships.

It was concluded that PLQ perceptions and SE levels of subordinate employees in the sample group were significantly related.

## **Key phrases**

*Labour; perceptions; primary; quality; relations; self-esteem and supervision*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Employees tend to view the organisations in which they work as one interactive living entity, which primarily interacts with employees through immediate supervisors. Most employees subsequently regard the positive or negative behaviour of their immediate supervisors as the behaviour of their employer as a whole (Shanock & Eisenberger 2006:694).

Primary labour relationship quality (PLQ) perceptions of subordinate employees are thus informed by the behaviour of their immediate supervisors, and secondary labour relationship quality perceptions of groups of employees, or union members, are informed by the behaviour of their employers or their representatives (Ehlers 2017:1).

Primary exchanges in labour relationships mostly occur within the boundaries of formal written employment contracts that contain explicit definitions of employment rights and duties. However, many relationship exchanges are guided by unwritten informal psychological contracts. These encapsulate a variety of subjective relationship expectations that are not addressed in formal employment contracts (DiMatteo, Bird & Colquitt 2009:453; Guest 2004:541).

Primary labour relationship quality (PLQ) perceptions of subordinate employees are thus related to supervisory relationship expectations and perceptions that reside in formal employment contracting dimensions (compliance), as well as psychological employment contracting dimensions (trust, fairness and good faith). (Ehlers 2013:48; Guest 2004:542-544; Navarro & Cabrera 2009:72-88; Van Staden & Smit 2010:702).

Self-esteem (SE) can be described as an individual attribute that is affected by a person's core sense of self as well as the environments in which the social relationships that inform his or her self-esteem evaluations occur (Powell 2009:32; Schmitt & Allik 2005:635). Conditions and experiences in physical, cultural and workplace environments can influence SE levels which, in turn, influence behaviour. Hence, employees with lower and higher levels of SE tend to respond differently to negative or positive feedback from their supervisors and workplace peers (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:224; Kuster, Orth & Meier 2013:673-674; Vogel & Mitchell 2015:1).

Pierce and Gardner (2004:591) concluded that employees with higher levels of SE experience themselves as being worthy and on an equal plane with their peers in a workplace and that such employees are more likely to display desirable organisational behaviour forms. Recent study findings by Ehlers (2017:3-5), Emmanuel and Olufunmi (2014:24) as well as Vogel and Mitchell (2015:1), support the findings of Pierce and Gardner (2004:591). Moreover, they strongly suggest that there may be a significant relationship between trust, fairness and good faith related PLQ perceptions (psychological contract dimension) of subordinate employees and their levels of self-esteem (SE). However, very little has been reported on the relationship between formal employment contracting

fulfilment, or procedural compliance (formal contracting dimension) and employee self-esteem levels.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study were to investigate relationships between general PLQ perceptions and SE levels of employees and to investigate differences in formal and psychological contract related PLQ perceptions of employees with different SE levels. The author posed the following specific research questions to meet the study objectives:

1. Are there any statistically significant relationships between general PLQ perceptions and SE levels of employees in the sample group?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences in the general PLQ perceptions of employees with lower and higher levels of SE?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in compliance-related PLQ perceptions (formal employment contracting dimension) of employees with lower and higher levels of SE?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences in the trust, fairness and good faith related PLQ perceptions (psychological employment contracting dimension) of employees with lower and higher levels of SE?

Following the introduction, the author provides a literature review and discusses the research objectives and methodology implemented in the study. He then outlines his research findings and limitations before making recommendations and drawing final conclusions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review provides a brief overview of PLQ theory and the measurement of primary employment relationship quality (PLQ) perceptions, as well as a discussion of the nature of, and measurement of general self-esteem (SE) levels.

### **2.1 Primary labour relationship quality (PLQ) theory**

Primary labour relationship quality is a theoretical construct that refers to a distinct subjective quality estimate that a subordinate employee assimilates from unique expectations and perceptions of the levels of compliance, fairness, good faith and trust that an immediate supervisor displays in his or her labour relationship (Ehlers 2017:9).

PLQ theory assumes that positive subordinate employee perceptions of the levels of trust, compliance, fairness and good faith and all related behaviour forms will be predominant in

good quality supervisory relationships. It assumes furthermore, that such positive perceptions will be positively related to desirable relationship behaviour forms and negatively related to undesirable or deviant relationship behaviour forms. Lower levels of distrust, non-compliance, unfairness and bad faith should accordingly be evident in good quality labour relationships (Ehlers 2013:55-61; Ehlers 2017:3-9; Guest 2004:541).

Conversely, PLQ theory also assumes that negative subordinate employee perceptions of trust, compliance, fairness and good faith and all related behaviour forms, will be predominant in poor quality supervisory relationships and that such negative perceptions will be negatively related to desirable relationship behaviour forms, and positively related to undesirable or deviant relationship behaviour. Higher levels of distrust, non-compliance, unfairness and bad faith, should accordingly be evident in poor quality labour relationships (Ehlers 2017:3-9; Tepper 2007:261).

Table 1 summarises the four desirable social conditions and related behaviour forms that are believed to facilitate perceptions of good quality primary labour relationships, as well as higher levels of employment relationship satisfaction of subordinate employees in South African organisations (Ehlers & Lessing 2016:761).

**TABLE 1: Desirable social conditions in labour relationships**

<p><b>Trust</b></p> <p>Relationship partners are willing to risk vulnerability by relying on their relationship partner to behave in an expected manner.</p>	<p>Trust is evident when parties are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Convinced (undoubted acceptance of relationship objectives and partner bona fides)</li> <li>ii. Devoted (committed to relationship objectives and performance of relationship duties)</li> <li>iii. Tolerant (accept relationship partner's shortcomings and unforeseen relationship duties)</li> <li>iv. Supportive (encourage or assist relationship partners to perform their duties)</li> <li>v. Loyal (act in the best interest of a relationship partner – do not exploit partner vulnerabilities)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Compliance</b></p> <p>Relationship partners comply with formal relationship guidelines in all their relationship exchanges.</p>	<p>Compliance is evident when parties are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Constitutional (comply with constitutional provisions)</li> <li>ii. Legal (comply with applicable labour laws)</li> <li>iii. Contractual (comply with formal labour contracts or collective agreements)</li> <li>iv. Directional (comply with legitimate organisational strategies, policies and codes)</li> <li>v. Procedural (comply with legitimate organisational procedures and rules)</li> </ul>

<p><b>Fairness</b></p> <p>Relationship partners treat each other in an even-handed manner in all relationship exchanges.</p>	<p>Fairness is evident when parties are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Informed (are aware of facts relating to an issue under discussion)</li> <li>ii. Objective (act in a neutral or impartial manner)</li> <li>iii. Equitable (treat actual equals as equals)</li> <li>iv. Consistent (act in the same manner in similar circumstances at different times)</li> <li>v. Reciprocal (perform duties before, when or after claiming rights – give and take in equal measures)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Good faith</b></p> <p>Relationship partners sincerely promote mutual relationship benefits in all relationship exchanges.</p>	<p>Good faith is evident when parties are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Interested (show an active interest in another person's views)</li> <li>ii. Sincere (display honesty and transparency)</li> <li>iii. Respectful (show concern for ideas and dignity of others)</li> <li>iv. Constructive (display positive commitment to progress during exchanges)</li> <li>v. Considerate (take circumstances of relationship partners into account)</li> </ul>

Source: Ehlers 2017:5

## 2.2 Measuring PLQ perceptions

PLQ can be regarded as a hierarchical construct with four major components, namely; trust, compliance, fairness and good faith. Each of these components or social conditions encapsulates five subcomponents that represent a number of distinct but interrelated employment relationship behaviour forms, as reflected in Table 1.

Ehlers and Jordaan (2016:1-28) adopted this perspective to develop a valid and reliable research instrument for measuring, analysing and comparing the nature of PLQ perceptions of subordinate employees in South African organisations. The measure contains 20 statements that were linked to Likert-type scales, with options ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (5). The sum of scores on the 20 items denotes a composite PLQ score that can range from 0 to 100. Higher scores on the measure signify positive perceptions of PLQ, while lower scores signify negative perceptions of PLQ (Ehlers & Jordaan 2016:22).

The research methodology section will provide specific details about the validity and reliability of the PLQ measure.

## 2.3 Self-esteem

Self-concept refers to the totality of cognitive beliefs that people have about themselves and includes everything that is known about the self. This knowledge encapsulates name, race, likes, dislikes, beliefs, values, appearance, height and weight. Self-esteem, however, is an

emotional response that people experience as they contemplate and evaluate different things about themselves. Orth and Robbins (2014:381) described self-esteem as “an individual’s subjective evaluation of his or her worth as a person, and a feeling that one is good enough”.

Branden (2013:1) defined self-esteem as “the disposition to experience oneself as being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness. It is confidence in the efficacy of our mind, in our ability to think. By extension, it is confidence in our ability to learn, make appropriate choices and decisions, and respond effectively to change. It is also the experience that success, achievement, fulfilment – happiness – are right and natural for us. The survival value of such confidence is obvious; so is the danger when it is missing”.

In addition, Branden (1995:1-330) identified and described six action-based practices or pillars that provide the foundation for developing and utilising positive self-esteem in workplaces, parenting, education, psychotherapy and societal culture. These pillars are living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully and personal integrity. In contrast, negative self-esteem is associated with increased sensitivity to and reliance on social evaluations increased concern about views of others, anger and hostility (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:22).

Global or general self-esteem is a mental state or personality trait that develops in accordance with many personal experiences that occur over a prolonged time period. Orth and Robbins (2014:381) found that self-esteem increases over time and peaks between the ages of 50 and 60, and then decreases at an accelerated pace into old age. They also established that self-esteem is a relatively stable trait that may change over time, and that high self-esteem levels predict success and wellbeing in life domains such as relationships, work and health.

Ferris, Brown, Lian and Keeping (2009:1346) were of the opinion that contingent self-esteem occurs when a person’s sense of self-worth becomes tied to success in a particular domain, such as work, appearance or sport, and the person becomes preoccupied with validating his or her abilities and performance in that particular domain. Self-esteem levels will rise or fall when the standards for success that the person is striving to meet are not met. However, if self-esteem is not contingent on a particular domain, success or failure in that domain holds very little implications to a person’s self-esteem.

Self-esteem will be influenced by emotions that people experience when they analyse, contemplate and evaluate different aspects of themselves and their objectives. Rama (2017:35) regarded low self-esteem as a debilitating condition that keeps individuals from realising their full potential, since they feel unworthy, incapable, and incompetent to live. However, many people who do not like themselves (lower self-esteem) can still acknowledge and rely on their positive traits (stronger self-concept). Conversely, many people who like themselves (higher self-esteem), can still discount or overlook their positive traits (weaker self-concept). Self-concept and self-esteem are thus related to each other, but they do not refer to the same phenomenon (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:219-221).

#### **2.4 Workplace behaviour and self-esteem**

Kuster *et al.* (2013:673-674) found that employees with high levels of global or individual self-esteem could be expected to contribute to better working conditions and outcomes, which yielded numerous organisational benefits. They subsequently recommended that organisations should aim to attract and select employees with healthy self-esteem levels, protect self-esteem levels of all employees and implement appropriate psychological interventions to enhance the self-esteem of all employees. A study by Vogel and Mitchell (2015:1) confirmed that abusive supervision indirectly influences employees' workplace deviance and self-presentational behaviour via diminished self-esteem.

Employees with lower levels of self-esteem normally respond very well to positive feedback but may become extremely defensive when they receive negative feedback from other workgroup members in their immediate work environment. Employees with higher levels of self-esteem, conversely, will also respond very well to positive feedback but can be expected to remain objective, independent and inclusive when they receive negative feedback from other workgroup members in their immediate workplace environment (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:224; Shu & Lazatkhan 2017:71-172 ).

Organisational based self-esteem (OBSE) is a unique form of self-esteem that reflects an employee's evaluation of his or her personal adequacy and worthiness as an organisational member as well as his or her perceived value of self in the wider organisational context (David & Vivek 2012:283). OBSE thus refers to the degree to which an individual believes him or herself to be capable, significant and worthy as an organisational member in an organisational context.

Pierce and Gardner (2004:613-617) reviewed more than a decade of literature and research findings on OBSE. They concluded that global SE and OBSE perform a central role in the direction and motivation of human behaviour. They observed that sources of organisation structure, signals from the organisation about worth as well as success-building role conditions predict OBSE. They also found that OBSE is related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, motivation, citizenship behaviour, in-role performance and turnover intentions, as well as other important organisation-related attitudes and behaviours.

Narayanan & Murphy (2017:3) were of the opinion that a variety of deviant workplace behaviours can contribute to diminished self-esteem levels of employees. The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) (2011:1) identified mental bullying, ridiculing of subordinates; sexual or racial harassment and victimisation, among others, as undesirable supervisory behaviour that constitutes workplace harassment. Such non-compliant, unfair or bad faith behaviours of supervisors are typical causes of workplace tension, workplace conflict, formal grievances and labour disputes (Ehlers 2017:2). Unfair and undesirable supervisory behaviours are significantly related to numerous forms of undesirable or deviant supervisory behaviour and it can be confidently expected to have a negative effect on subordinate self-esteem levels (Kuster *et al.* 2013:673; Tepper 2007:261; Vogel & Mitchell 2015:1).

## 2.5 Self-esteem and sociometer theory

Leary, Tambor, Terdal and Downs (1995:518-530) developed Sociometer theory. They assumed that all humans have a fundamental need to belong that is rooted in the need to evolve, survive and reproduce within a group. People in groups are always more likely to survive and reproduce than those who do not belong to any group. Sociometer theory suggests that people want to belong to a group and those self-esteem functions as a type of meter or gauge, which indicates the likelihood that a person will be excluded from a group. People will feel more comfortable when their sociometers indicate acceptance by a group but will experience discomfort when their sociometers indicate a risk of rejection by group members (Leary *et al.* 1995:518-530).

Sociometer theory is also linked to self-esteem that relates to interaction in work groups. The sociometer will warn workgroup members that there is a higher risk of rejection when they behave in ways that are unacceptable to other workgroup members. The resulting fear of rejection leads to more cautious and conforming behaviour, which is typical of lower levels of self-esteem. However, the sociometer can also confirm that there is a low risk of rejection

by a workgroup. A workgroup member will then be more likely to display self-reliant or inspiring behaviour forms that are typical of people with higher levels of self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:222; Leary *et al.* 1995:525-530).

## 2.6 Measuring self-esteem

There are global and hierarchical theoretical approaches to measuring and studying self-esteem. The global approach assumes that self-esteem is an overall self-attitude that permeates all aspects of people's lives. Self-esteem can, therefore, be measured by merely asking a person to indicate his disagreement or agreement with the statement "I have high self-esteem" on a five-point Likert scale (Robins Hendin & Trzesniewski 2001:151-161).

The hierarchical approach assumes that self-esteem is a hierarchical construct with three major components, namely: Performance self-esteem, Social self-esteem and Physical self-esteem. All three components can be broken down into smaller and smaller subcomponents, and related research instruments have been validated to measure and analyse self-esteem levels from this perspective. Performance self-esteem encapsulates a person's sense of general competence, intellectual abilities, school performance, self-regulatory capacities, self-confidence and efficacy. Social self-esteem refers to the beliefs that people hold on how other people perceive them. Physical self-esteem refers to the way that people view their physical bodies, athleticism, attractiveness, body image, as well as their experience and feelings about gender, age, race and ethnicity stigmas. (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:224).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE) is the most widely used measure of global self-esteem (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:225-226). The RSE contains 10 items that are linked to a Likert-type scale, which contains options ranging from disagreement to agreement. Each item represents a factor that is closely related to general self-esteem levels. The RSE is highly consistent and reliable (Chronbach's alpha = .92), and correlates modestly with mood measures. Scorers should be mindful that the five positive and five negative, or reversed, scale items may pose a slight challenge during scoring. Typical scores on the Rosenberg scale are around 22 and most people score between 15 and 25. Variations on the RSE have been widely used in related research studies since 1979 (Schmitt & Allik 2005:623-642).

## 2.7 Summary

PLQ theory relates to subordinate employee perceptions of trust, compliance, fairness and good faith in supervisory relationships. Ehlers and Jordaan (2016:1-28) developed a valid

and reliable measure of PLQ perceptions. Self-esteem can be described as the evaluative aspect of a person's self-concept that specifically relates to a person's view of his or her worthiness or unworthiness. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale has been widely used to measure levels of general self-esteem (Schmitt & Allik 2005:623). The work of Kuster *et al.* (2013:673-674), Pierce and Gardner (2004:613-617) and Vogel and Mitchell (2015:1) strongly suggest the existence of a significant relationship between PLQ perceptions of subordinate employees and their levels of self-esteem.

In the last decade, there have been no reports in the South African literature of any studies into the relationship between PLQ perceptions and SE levels of South African employees in general, or more specifically in the Tshwane region.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research design and steps**

The author devised and implemented a correlational research design, encapsulating a literature review, implementation of a convenience sampling method, a cross-sectional questionnaire survey and statistical analysis of quantitative data to meet the objectives of this study (Creswell 2014:41). The study objectives were achieved by implementing the following steps:

1. A literature review on the nature of, and measurement of PLQ and SE was undertaken, and a mixed method research design was devised.
2. Valid and reliable measures of PLQ perceptions and SE levels of employees were identified and combined in a customised survey questionnaire.
3. The survey questionnaire was completed by 454 conveniently sampled employees from the Tshwane region of South Africa.
4. Questionnaire data was captured and statistically analysed in SPSSv21.
5. The normality of data distribution was investigated. The Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed that data was not normally distributed and non-parametric inferential statistical tests were subsequently used for further statistical analysis (Ghasemi & Zahediasl 2012:486-489).
6. The significance of relationships between general PLQ perceptions and general SE levels was investigated by applying the Spearman's Rho test (Salkind 2014:310).
7. The significance of differences between PLQ perceptions of sample group members with lower, average and higher levels of SE levels was investigated. The author applied the Mann-Whitney U test for significance of differences in means of two or more sample

groups, and the Kruskal-Wallis test for significant differences of means of three or more independent sample groups to determine the statistical significance of differences in means of sample groups (Salkind 2014:310).

8. Literature and research findings were compared and conclusions were drawn.

### 3.2 Research sample

The target population was defined as the estimated 1.1 million people employed in the Tshwane region (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2013:4). A purely random sampling size of 384 could be regarded as an adequate random sampling size for a target population of 1.1 million people if a 5% margin of sampling error was tolerable (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins 2001:48). However, since practical, time, cost and logistical limitations necessitated a convenience sampling approach, a total of 454 completed questionnaires were subsequently collected from conveniently sampled employees in the Tshwane region (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:212). All potential participants in the study were informed on the voluntary nature of the study, the objectives of the study, their right to confidentiality, their right to abstain from participation and their right to withdraw from the study during or after completion of the survey questionnaire (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole 2013:32).

The eventual convenience sample size of 454 far exceeded the recommended random sample size of 384. However, due to the fact that no random sample was drawn from a target population, it was necessary to make all subsequently related conclusions and generalisation of findings with due recognition of this shortcoming (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:216). Table 2 provides an overview of the most important sample characteristics.

**TABLE 2: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Category	Sample size (n=454)	Percentage
<b>Age</b> ( $\bar{x} = 34.28$ , $s = 10.6$ )		
Under 35	271	61
35 and over	183	39
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	219	48
Female	235	52
<b>Race</b>		
African	368	81

Coloured	26	6
Asian/Indian	17	4
European	43	9

### 3.3 Research questionnaire

The survey questionnaire included ten general biographical items, 20 items from a valid, reliable and normalised measure of PLQ, and ten slightly adapted SE items that correspond with the ten adequately valid and reliable items in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) scale. All items in the PLQ and SE sections were linked to a six-point Likert type scale, in which selection descriptions ranged between definitely false (0) and definitely true (5). A Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.909 confirmed that the customised research questionnaire possessed higher than adequate levels of consistency and reliability. The validity of the customised questionnaire was assumed to be higher than adequate in light of previous findings on the validity of the PLQ measure and the RSE (Ehlers & Jordaan 2016:20; Heatherton & Wyland 2003:225).

The total of all 20 PLQ item scores constitutes an individual's general PLQ score. General PLQ scores could range from a maximum low of 0 to a maximum high of 100. General scores on the adapted SE measure used in this study could range from a maximum low of 0 to a maximum high of 50. However, according to Heatherton & Wyland (2003:230), general scores typically expected on the original four-point Rosenberg scale are around 22 out of 30 and most people score between 15 and 25 out of 30. It could, therefore, be expected that most scores on the adapted six-point scale SE measure would be around 37 out of 50. This expectation was tested and confirmed to be correct ( $\bar{x} = 36.80$ ). The standard deviation of scores on the adapted SE measure was 7.2. This strongly suggested that most people would score between 29 and 44 out of 50 on the adapted SE measure.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Data distribution

Both the Shapiro-Wilk and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for normality of data distribution assume that scores in a dataset are not normally distributed when  $p \leq .05$ . The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test should, however, be preferred when datasets are larger than 2000 (Ghasemi & Zahediasl 2012:486-489). The mean PLQ score ( $n=454$ ) was 67.96 out of 100 and the

standard deviation was 20.57. A Shapiro-Wilk test was performed and it was confidently concluded that PLQ perception scores were not normally distributed ( $p=.00 \leq .05$ ).

The mean SE score ( $n=454$ ) was 36.80 out of 50 and the standard deviation was 7.15. A Shapiro-Wilk test also confirmed that SE level scores were not normally distributed ( $p=.00 \leq .05$ ). The author subsequently used non-parametric inferential statistical tests to analyse SE and PLQ data.

## 4.2 Relationship between PLQ and SE

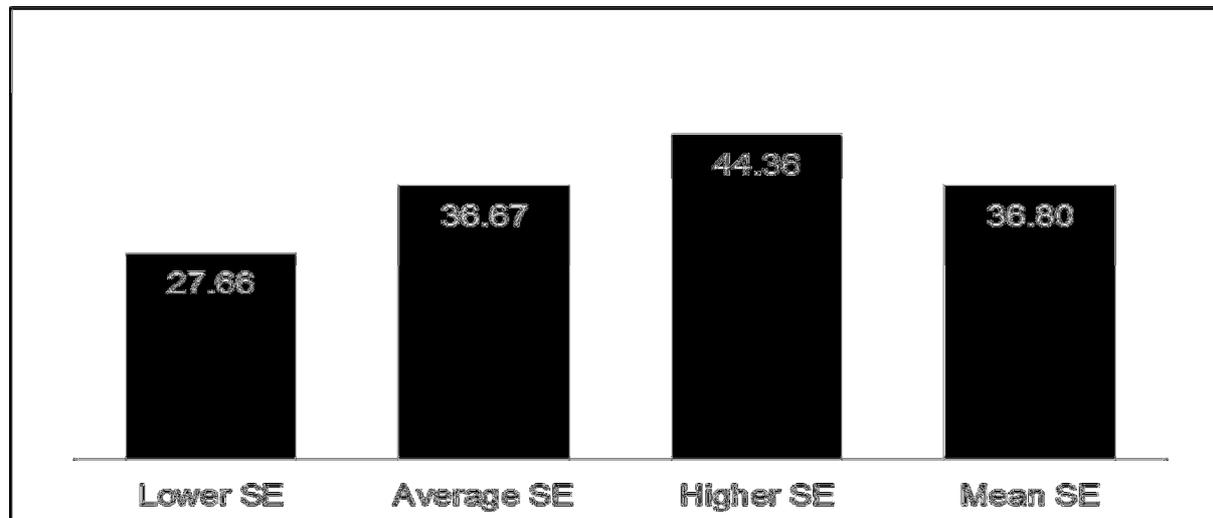
A non-parametric Spearman Rho test for statistically significant relationships between two variables, namely PLQ perceptions and SE levels returned a positive correlation coefficient ( $r=0.232$ ) with very high statistical significance ( $p=.000 \leq 0.01$ ) (Salkind 2014:182). These results confirmed a highly significant positive correlation between general PLQ perception scores and general SE level scores of the sample group.

Additional Spearman Rho tests confirmed that there were statistically significant positive correlations between the scores on the four primary PLQ conditions and general SE scores of sample members ( $p \leq .01$ ). There were also highly significant positive correlations between all 20 PLQ questionnaire items ( $p \leq .01$ ), except item 16, which was only marginally significant ( $p=.077 \leq .08$ ) (Salkind 2014:182).

## 4.3 Sample group differentiation

Initial data analysis suggested that there was a highly significant correlation between SE and PLQ scores of sample members. The sample group then needed to be divided into distinctive sample groups to facilitate effective inferential statistical analysis of differences in mean PLQ perceptions. Analysis of the distribution of SE scores ( $n=454$ ,  $\bar{x}=36.80$ ,  $s=7.15$ ) revealed that approximately one third of all SE scores fell between half a standard deviation below the mean (33.2), and half a standard deviation above the mean (40.4), approximately a third of all SE scores were below 33.2. and approximately a third of all SE scores were above 40.4.

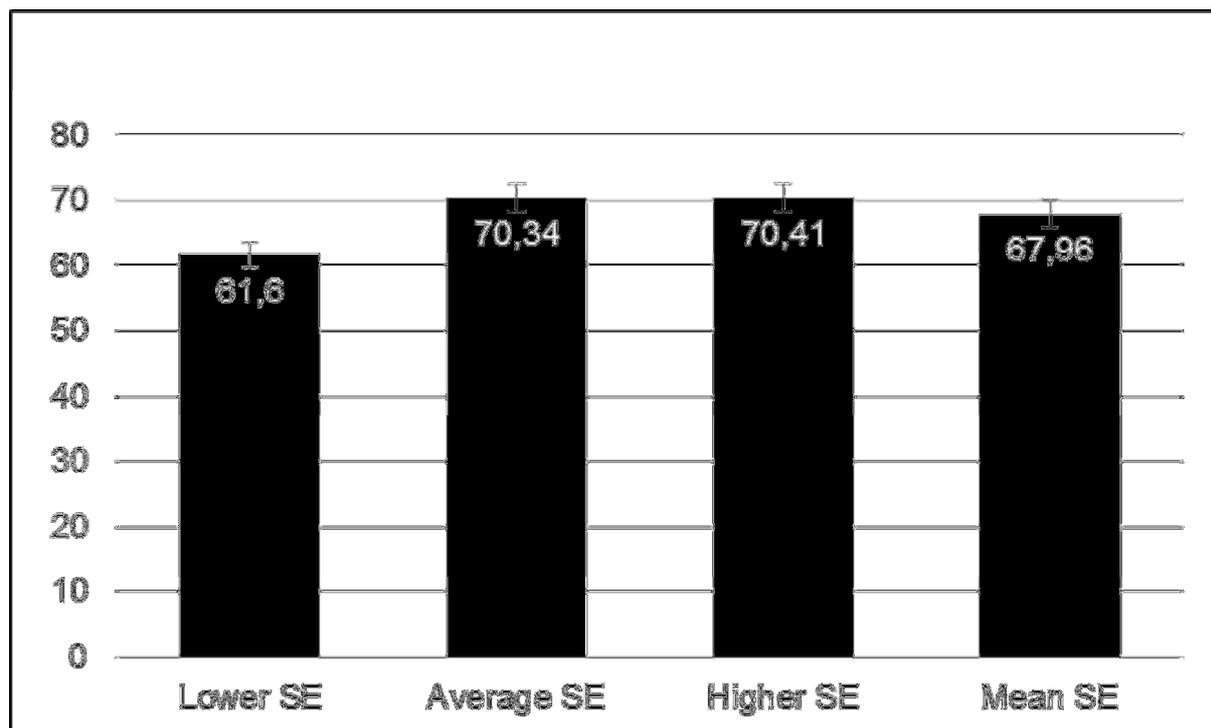
Scores ranging from 0 to 33 were subsequently regarded as scores of a distinctive sample group with lower SE levels ( $n=125$ ,  $\bar{x}=27.66$ ,  $s=3.85$ ). Scores ranging from 34 to 40 were regarded as scores of a distinctive sample group with average SE levels ( $n=175$ ,  $\bar{x}=36.67$ ,  $s=2.32$ ). Scores ranging from 41 to 50 were regarded as scores of a distinctive sample group with higher SE levels ( $n=154$ ,  $\bar{x}=44.36$ ,  $s=2.69$ ). Figure 1 reflects the differences in mean SE scores of the aforementioned sample groups.

**FIGURE 1: MEAN SE SCORES OF SAMPLE GROUPS (OUT OF 50)**

The lower SE level sample group (n=125) had a mean PLQ perception score of 61.60 with a standard deviation of 21.16. The average SE level sample group (n=175) had a mean PLQ perception score of 70.34 with a standard deviation of 17.88. The higher SE level sample group (n=154) had a mean PLQ perception score of 70.41 with a standard deviation of 21.93.

A non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to test the statistical significance of the difference in mean PLQ scores of the three aforementioned sample groups (Salkind 2014:310). The test confirmed that there was a statistically significant difference ( $p=.000 \leq .01$ ) between the mean general PLQ scores of at least one sample group and PLQ scores of other sample groups. Statistically significant differences at  $p \leq .05$  also existed between the PLQ scores of the three groups on each of the four composite scores and all of the individual PLQ items, except for item 6 ( $p=.224$ ) and 16 ( $p=.157$ ). Figure 2 reflects the differences in mean PLQ scores of the sample groups.

**FIGURE 2: MEAN PLQ SCORES OF SAMPLE GROUPS (OUT OF 100)**



A review of descriptive statistics confirmed that mean PLQ scores of respondents with lower SE levels (61.60) were around 9% lower than the corresponding mean scores of both average level SE ( $\bar{x}=70.34$ ) and higher level SE ( $\bar{x}=70.41$ ) groups. The difference in means of the PLQ scores of lower SE and average SE level groups was thus very similar to the difference in means of PLQ scores of lower SE and higher SE level groups. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was subsequently used to investigate the significance of differences between PLQ perception scores of only two unrelated sample groups, namely sample members with lower and higher SE levels (Salkind 2014:310).

#### 4.4 Differences in general PLQ perceptions

Results of a Mann-Whitney U test for statistical significance of differences in means of two independent samples (Salkind 2014:184) confirmed a highly significant difference ( $p=.000\leq.01$ ) between the mean PLQ scores of sample members with lower SE levels ( $\bar{x}=61.60$ ,  $s=21.60$ ) and sample members with higher SE levels ( $\bar{x}=70.41$ ,  $s=20.57$ ) (Salkind, 2014:182). The mean PLQ scores of respondents with higher levels of SE were 14.3% higher than the mean PLQ scores of respondents with lower SE levels.

#### 4.5 Differences in compliance-related PLQ perceptions

Results of a Mann-Whitney U test confirmed that there was a highly significant difference ( $p=.000\leq.01$ ) between the compliance-related PLQ mean scores of sample members with

lower SE levels ( $\bar{x}=15.99$ ,  $s=5.48$ ) and sample members with higher SE levels ( $\bar{x}=18.58$ ,  $s=5.39$ ) (Salkind 2014:184). The mean compliance-related PLQ score of respondents with higher levels SE was 16.19% higher than the mean score of respondents with lower levels of SE.

Further Mann-Whitney U tests also confirmed that there were statistically significant differences at  $p \leq 0.01$  between the means of compliance-related PLQ scores of the two sample groups on items 1, 5, 9, 13 and 17. Respondents with higher SE in the sample group levels had significantly more positive compliance-related LRQ perceptions than respondents in the sample group with lower SE.

Table 3 reflects the means, standard deviations and significance of differences in compliance-related PLQ scores of sample groups with lower and higher SE levels.

**TABLE 3: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN COMPLIANCE-RELATED PERCEPTIONS**

LRQ measure item	Lower SE levels (n=125)		Higher SE levels (n=154)		All (n=454)		Mann-Whitney U test
	$\bar{x}$	s	$\bar{x}$	s	$\bar{x}$	s	P
Compliance-related PLQ	15.99	5.48	18.58	5.39	17.76	5.24	.000
1. Constitutional	3.24	1.38	3.84	1.35	3.64	1.33	.000
5. Legislative	3.32	1.25	3.75	1.41	3.59	1.33	.001
9. Contractual	3.15	1.29	3.71	1.30	3.51	1.27	.000
13. Directional	3.23	1.23	3.69	1.42	3.53	1.26	.003
17. Procedural	3.05	1.36	3.58	1.36	3.50	1.31	.000

#### 4.6 Differences in trust-related PLQ perceptions

A Mann-Whitney U test confirmed that there was a highly significant difference ( $p = .000 \leq .01$ ) between the trust-related PLQ mean scores of sample members with lower PLQ levels ( $\bar{x}=15.18$ ,  $s=5.38$ ) and sample members with higher PLQ levels ( $\bar{x}=16.40$ ,  $s=5.66$ ) (Salkind, 2014:182). The mean trust-related PLQ score of respondents with higher levels of SE was

8.03% higher than the mean PLQ score of respondents with lower levels of SE. Additional Mann-Whitney U tests also confirmed that there were statistically significant differences at  $p \leq 0.5$  between the means of trust-related PLQ scores of the two sample groups on items 4, 8, 12 and 20, but no significant difference existed between scores on item 16 ( $p=.248$ ).

Table 4 reflects the means, standard deviations and significance of differences of trust-related perceptions of sample groups with lower and higher SE levels.

**TABLE 4: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN TRUST-RELATED PERCEPTIONS**

LRQ measure item	Lower SE levels (n=125)		Higher SE levels (n=154)		All (n=454)		Mann-Whitney U test P
	$\bar{x}$	S	$\bar{x}$	S	$\bar{x}$	s	
Trust-related PLQ	15.18	5.38	16.74	6.30	16.40	5.66	.004
4. Conviction	3.18	1.17	3.56	1.36	3.43	1.25	.001
8. Devotion	3.23	1.28	3.64	1.42	3.55	1.30	.004
12. Tolerance	2.96	1.33	3.32	1.38	3.21	1.32	.018
16. Supportive	2.73	1.38	2.85	1.62	2.87	1.46	.248*
20. Loyalty	3.07	1.35	3.37	1.51	3.34	1.42	.032

#### 4.7 Differences in fairness-related PLQ perceptions

A Mann-Whitney U test confirmed that there was a highly significant difference ( $p=.000 \leq .01$ ) between the fairness-related PLQ mean scores of sample members with lower SE levels ( $\bar{x}=15.23$ ,  $s=5.32$ ) and sample members with higher SE levels ( $\bar{x}=17.29$ ,  $s=5.46$ ) (Salkind 2014:182). The mean fairness-related PLQ score of respondents with higher levels of SE was 13.52% higher than the mean score of respondents with lower SE scores.

Additional Mann-Whitney U tests further confirmed that there were statistically significant differences at  $p \leq 0.05$  between the means of fairness-related PLQ scores on items 2, 10, 14

and 18. However, no significant difference existed between scores on item 6 ( $p=.076$ ). Table 5 reflects the means, standard deviations and significance of differences of fairness-related PLQ perceptions of sample groups with lower and higher SE levels.

**TABLE 5: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN FAIRNESS-RELATED PERCEPTIONS**

LRQ measure item	Lower SE levels (n=125)		Higher SE levels (n=154)		All (n=454)		Mann-Whitney U test (A-C)
	$\bar{x}$	s	$\bar{x}$	s	$\bar{x}$	s	P
Fairness-related PLQ	15.23	5.32	17.29	5.46	16.64	5.17	.000
2. Awareness	3.22	1.09	3.71	1.22	3.50	1.18	.000
6. Objectivity	3.14	1.24	3.32	1.49	3.27	1.34	.076*
10. Equity	2.96	1.41	3.42	1.52	3.30	1.46	.002
14. Consistency	2.98	1.31	3.34	1.59	3.24	1.37	.033
18. Reciprocity	3.01	1.32	3.51	1.35	3.35	1.28	.001

#### 4.8 Differences in good faith-related PLQ perceptions

Mann-Whitney U test results confirmed that there was a highly significant difference ( $p=.000 \leq .01$ ) between the good faith-related PLQ mean scores of sample members with lower SE levels ( $\bar{x}=15.49$ ,  $s=5.49$ ) and sample members with higher SE levels ( $\bar{x}=17.81$ ,  $s=5.95$ ) (Salkind 2014:182). The mean good faith-related PLQ score of respondents with higher SE score levels was 14.97 % higher than the mean score of respondents with lower SE levels. Further Mann-Whitney U tests also confirmed that there were statistically significant differences at  $p \leq 0.01$  between scores on items 3, 7, 11, 15 and 18. Table 6 reflects the means, standard deviations and significance of differences of good faith-related PLQ perceptions of sample groups with lower and higher SE levels.

**TABLE 6: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES IN GOOD FAITH-RELATED PERCEPTIONS**

LRQ measure item	Lower SE levels (n=125)		Higher SE levels (n=154)		All (n=454)		Mann-Whitney U test
	$\bar{x}$	s	$\bar{x}$	s	$\bar{x}$	s	P
Good faith-related PLQ	15.49	5.49	17.81	5.95	17.23	5.61	.000
3. Interest	3.07	1.33	3.49	1.35	3.42	1.32	.003
7. Sincerity	3.14	1.28	3.60	1.33	3.47	1.27	.001
11. Consideration	3.04	1.30	3.49	1.39	3.35	1.34	.002
15. Respect	3.19	1.41	3.69	1.42	3.57	1.37	.001
19. Constructivity	3.05	1.26	3.53	1.29	3.41	1.28	.000

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Overview

A literature review suggested that numerous researchers found a number of significant relationships between general self-esteem, SE, SE and a variety of positive and negative organisational phenomena (Emmanuel & Olufunmi 2014:24; Kuster *et al.* 2013:673; Vogel & Mitchell 2015:1-34). It was therefore confidently anticipated that PLQ perceptions of employees would be linked to their SE levels and that PLY-related perceptions of employees with lower and higher SE levels would differ significantly from each other. The author subsequently undertook a questionnaire survey and statistical analysis. The following section provides answers to the four research questions posed at the onset of this study.

### 5.2 Conclusive findings

#### 5.2.1 *The relationship between PLQ and SE*

Findings emanating from this study confirmed the existence of a highly significant relationship between PLQ perceptions and SE levels of sample members ( $r=.232$ ;  $p\leq.01$ ). Findings also confirmed a significant difference between the PLQ perception scores of sample members with lower and higher SE levels (Mann-Whitney U test  $p=.000\leq.01$ ) (Salkind 2014:182). The mean PLQ score of sample members with higher levels of SE was

found to be 14.3% higher than the mean PLQ score of respondents with lower SE levels. There is thus conclusive proof that there are statistically significant relationships between PLQ perceptions and SE levels of employees in the sample group. The highly significant statistical findings together with a relatively large and representative sample strongly suggests that the aforementioned relationships may also be a typical phenomenon among most employees in the Tshwane region, and possibly, in most South African regions.

### **5.2.2 Psychological contract fulfilment and SE**

Sociometer theory supposes that an employee will be more likely to display self-reliant or inspiring behaviour forms that are typical of people with higher self-esteem levels if there is a low risk of rejection by a workgroup, or its members (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:222; Leary *et al.* 1995:518-530). The following statistically significant findings on differences between PLQ perceptions of employees with lower and higher SE levels support the assumption of sociometer theory. Furthermore, these findings corroborate the findings of Kuster *et al.* (2013:673-674), Pierce and Gardner (2004:613-617) and Vogel and Mitchell (2015:1). These findings also provide more evidence of the existence of a significant relationship between psychological contract fulfilment (psychological contract dimension) and self-esteem in organisational contexts (Emmanuel & Olufunmi 2014:24):

1. Employees with higher SE levels had 8.03% more positive perceptions of trust-related PLQ than employees with lower levels of SE ( $p \leq .01$ ). In addition, there were statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) differences in related perceptions of the quality of conviction, devotion, tolerance and loyalty in primary labour relationships. However, there were no differences in support-related perceptions of sample groups with lower and higher SE levels ( $p = .248$ ).
2. Employees with higher SE levels had 13.52% more positive perceptions of fairness-related PLQ than employees with lower levels of SE ( $p \leq .01$ ). Furthermore, there were statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) differences in related perceptions of the quality of awareness, equity, consistency and reciprocity in primary labour relationships. However, there was only a slightly significant difference in objectivity-related perceptions of sample groups with lower and higher SE levels ( $p = .076$ ).
3. Employees with higher SE levels had 14.97% more positive perceptions of good faith-related PLQ than employees with lower levels of SE ( $p \leq .01$ ). Highly significant ( $p \leq .01$ ) differences were also observed in related perceptions of the quality of interest, sincerity, respect, consideration and constructivity in primary labour relationships.

### **5.2.3 Formal employment contract fulfilment and SE**

Employees with higher SE levels had 16.19% more positive perceptions of compliance related PLQ than employees with lower levels of SE ( $p \leq .01$ ). There were also highly significant ( $p \leq .01$ ) differences in related perceptions of the quality of constitutional, legal, contractual, directional and procedural compliance in primary labour relationships (Salkind 2014:182). These findings strongly suggest that there are statistically significant differences between compliance-related PLQ perceptions (formal employment contracting dimension) of employees with lower and higher self-esteem levels, as contemplated at the onset of the study.

### **5.3 Limitations and recommendations**

A statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = .232$ ) between the PLQ perception scores and SE level scores of employees in the sample group (Spearman Rho  $p = .000 \leq .01$ ) was confirmed. However, this study did not investigate causality and linearity of relationships between these variables, and it is subsequently recommended that further research is undertaken in this regard.

Practical and cost considerations necessitated the use of a convenience method, instead of a more trustworthy random sampling method to collect data for purposes of this study ( $n = 454$ ). However, the highly significant relationship between PLQ perceptions and SE levels of employees ( $p \leq .01$ ), as well as the highly noteworthy differences in PLC perceptions of sample groups with lower and higher levels of SE ( $p \leq .01$ ), strongly imply that a random sampling method would not have yielded significantly different results that would result in vastly different conclusions (Leedy & Ormrod 2010:216). Nevertheless, the author is of the opinion that it would be beneficial to undertake similar research studies in other South African regions to test the validity and generalisability of the findings from this study.

Sociometer theory can also be confidently applied to investigate employee self-esteem in the context of work groups (Heatherton & Wyland 2003:222; Leary *et al.* 1995:518-530). The study findings validate the usefulness of deliberately developing objective labour relationship sociometers that may prove to be highly beneficial for all stakeholders in labour relationships. Such formal or informal sociometers could warn stakeholders that there is a higher risk of rejection, or confirm higher levels of acceptance by another labour relationship stakeholder. Relationship behaviour could accordingly be adapted to restore or maintain balance in the labour relationship. With this in mind, the author recommends that further

research into the relationship between PLQ theory and sociometer theory should be undertaken.

#### 5.4 Concluding remarks

This study confirmed that there were highly significant relationships between PLQ perceptions and SE levels. The study also uncovered highly significant differences between the PLQ-related perceptions of a sample of Tshwane-based employees with lower and higher levels of SE. The aforementioned relationships and differences were considerable in the context of formal and psychological employment contracts. These findings strongly suggest that the PLQ expectations, experiences and perceptions of employees in South African workplaces are at least significantly related, and potentially causally related to their levels of SE.

South African supervisors and subordinates have to deal with a variety of dynamic and unpredictable labour relationship challenges that emanate from a socially sensitive, politically aware and economically challenging labour market (Ehlers 2017:2). The influence of supervisory behaviour on PLQ perceptions, self-esteem levels and resulting organisational behaviour of subordinates, should therefore not be underestimated (Shanock & Eisenberger 2006:694; Tepper 2007:261; Vogel & Mitchell 2015:1).

The findings of this study confirmed that the promotion of trust, compliance, fairness and good faith in supervisory, or primary labour relationships, is linked to numerous desirable organisational phenomena, and most noteworthy, to higher self-esteem levels of subordinate employees. Employers may thus reap numerous organisational benefits by making deliberate efforts to promote the quality of primary employment relationships. In fact, the promotion of PLQ should be regarded as an important priority in all relationships, but especially in relationships between people with diverse gender, racial, cultural, socio-economic, educational and racial characteristics or backgrounds (Ehlers 2017:2; Heatherton & Wyland 2003:222; Kuster *et al.* 2013:673; Pierce & Gardner 2004:613; Shanock & Eisenberger 2006:694).

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