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Source: *Child Welfare*, 2017, Vol. 95, No. 5 (2017), pp. 39-58

Published by: Child Welfare League of America

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48625514>

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# Factors Affecting Perceptions of Self-Value among Employees of Child Welfare Agencies

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of quality of supervision and a productive work climate on employee perceptions of self-value in the workplace. There continues to be significant concern among members of state legislatures and the public at large regarding the turnover of child protective services workforces and the resulting quality of service, in spite of years of continued dissatisfaction and generally poor morale among employees working in this field. The Survey of Employee Engagement was administered to employees of the Child Protective Services (CPS) Division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services in 2014. Structural equation modeling was used to examine the relationships between and among the factors under investigation. The study generated significant positive findings between the following variables: Quality of Supervision and Employee Perceptions of Value, Quality of Supervision and Productive Climate, Employee Perceptions of Value and Productive Climate, and Quality of Supervision and Employee Perceptions of Value as mediated by Productive Climate. The research addressed employee perceptions of self-value, an area which has not specifically and previously been explored in the extant literature related to CPS workers.

While the subject of previous research, less effort has been made in recent years to assess the conditions of the child protective services field that influence the motivation and well-being of those workers who provide these critically important services. It appears that longstanding challenges and frustrations encountered by child protective services workers in past years, such as high caseloads, poor training, and inadequate supervisory support, persist (Coenen, 2008; Flahive, 2015; Government of the District of Columbia, Office of the Inspector General, 2011; January 14; Sunset Advisory Commission, 2014; Priddy, 2015, September 23; Sacramento County Grand Jury, 2009). These concerns continue to drive low levels of employee morale, resulting in staggering levels of employee turnover—which in turn compromise child safety and welfare efforts in the communities these child welfare organizations serve.

For example, according to the Texas State Auditor's Office (SAO) (2015), in fiscal year 2014, health and human services organizations experienced the highest levels of employee turnover in Texas state government. Of the job classifications within these organizations, child protective services specialists experienced a 24.6% turnover rate. This resulted in the loss of 1,427 child protective services specialists throughout the state in a single year. Based on information from the employee exit surveys collected in fiscal year 2014, among the top reasons given by employees for leaving employment with their agencies were poor working conditions and issues with a supervisor. These findings are once again reflected in the most recent turnover report published by the Texas State Auditor's Office (2016) that continues to show a very high level of turnover (24.8%) among child protective services workers.

Although not mentioned in the 2016 Texas State Auditor's report, this continued high turnover rate was experienced in spite of a legislative mandate for a human resource management plan as elaborated in the Texas General Appropriations Act for the 2014–2015 biennium. The mandate requires Child Protective Services (CPS) to develop a plan to improve employee morale and retention. The Texas legislature relates its intention to evaluate this plan based on a decrease in turnover among agency staff, "specifically by the reduction in the turnover rates for caseworkers"

(Legislative Budget Board, 2013, p. II-40). In response to this mandate, a comprehensive review of the Department of Family and Protective Service's Child Protective Services division was conducted by The Stephen Group (2014), which culminated in a number of findings and wide-ranging operational recommendations. These included implementing improved training for supervisors and managers, promoting teamwork, and holding regional directors accountable for employee turnover in their regions. In an October 2014 presentation, CPS administration committed to making progress on several performance fronts by December 31, 2014, including the reduction of employee turnover. To date, there has been no improvement in turnover among CPS employees in Texas.

In the United States, there is a lengthy history of legislative concerns regarding employee turnover in CPS organizations. For example, in 2003, the State of Arizona Auditor General, in response to a request from the state legislature and while auditing the Division of Children, Youth and Families' Office of Child Protective Services, found a need to improve the adequacy of supervisor training. The audit uncovered that the high level of employee turnover was due in part to high caseloads, high stress, and poor supervisor support.

In an inspection report, the Government of the District of Columbia, Office of the Inspector General (2011) found that low morale contributed to turnover among social workers. This low morale was associated with high levels of stress, a lack of quality supervision, and a sense that workers do not feel valued by the agency.

In 2009, a grand jury in Sacramento County, California, considering the circumstances of the local death of a four year old, determined that the annual employee turnover rate of 22% was a significant impediment to program viability and efficiency. The investigation also concluded there was a longstanding effort on the part of management to avoid responsibility or accountability for their roles within the agency, and recommended that managers and supervisors be held accountable for the quality of their performance.

In a paper detailing the findings of past studies conducted in the state of Montana and related to caseworker conditions (Children, Families,

Health, and Human Services Interim Committee, 62nd Montana Legislature, 2011), legislative staff reference employee turnover rates for child welfare staff at 22% from 2002 until 2004, as well as offer their assessment that agency morale was quite low. They reference a federal General Accounting Office (GAO) report authored during the same period that approximated the national turnover of child protective services employees at 30% to 40% with average tenures of less than two years. The Montana report continues by relating the findings of a GAO study involving 27 state CPS agencies that determined that the causes of high turnover in those states included inadequate management, poor daily supervision, and elevated stress levels. Finally, in Coenen's (2008) research paper discussing the causes and consequences of employee turnover among child welfare workers from the same GAO study, the author noted that, while there were concerns regarding caseload demands and general workload, the areas of most concern voiced by child welfare employees and influencing voluntary turnover included a lack of perceived value by their agency, poor quality of supervision, and a poor work climate.

Similarly, concerns regarding poor working conditions, burnout, and quality of supervision were voiced by former Texas Child Protective Services staff who left employment in 2014 and 2015 (Texas State Auditor's Office, 2015; Texas State Auditor's Office, 2016). In a Sunset Advisory Commission (2014) Staff Report, the State of Texas determined that CPS efforts to reduce employee turnover simply neglected to address the key reasons for these departures. The state found that CPS focused on hiring large numbers of new workers but had not addressed a workplace climate and a quality of management and daily supervision that failed to adequately support and develop these employees. These were the very same concerns voiced by child protective service employees operating throughout the United States for many years. In fact, the most common complaints discussed by the participants of those earlier research studies and echoed by former Texas CPS employees in 2014 and 2015 were poor working climates and poor supervision and management support (Anderson, 2000; Barth, Lloyd, Christ, Chapman, & Dickinson, 2008; Bednar, 2003; Clare, 1988; Cole, 2004;

Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005; Dickinson, & Perry, 2002; Ellett, A., Ellett, C., & Rugutt, 2003; Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007; Gibbs, 2001; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Nissly, Mor Barak, & Levin, 2005; Smith, 2004; Tiuraniemi, 2008).

These conditions also adversely affect an employee's perception of how valued they are by the organization (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Clare, 1988; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Studies have shown that favorable perceptions of value result in greater relational attachment and positive citizenship behavior (Clare, 1988; Eisenberg et al., 1986; Hassan & Hatmaker, 2015; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998; Shore & Wayne, 1993), higher levels of job performance (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-MaMastro, 1990; Hassan & Hatmaker, 2015) and job satisfaction (Cole, 2004; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armelo, & Lynch, 1997), lower organizational turnover rates (Huselid, 1995) and increased organizational commitment (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Clare, 1988; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Hassan & Hatmaker, 2015; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). When employees believe that they and their coworkers are being treated fairly by supervisors and their opinions and ideas are valued and contribute to productivity, this signals to employees the degree to which the organization cares about them (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Clare, 1988; Hassan & Hatmaker, 2015; Hom & Griffeth, 1995; Huselid, 1995; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998). Such affirmations prompt employees to recognize and internalize the importance of their roles and impact on the organization.

## **Purpose of the Study**

In exploring the complaints commonly voiced by CPS employees historically as well as more recently, this study seeks to investigate the effects of quality of supervision and a productive work climate on employee perceptions of self-value in the workplace. This work is important as studies have indicated that employee perceptions of value in the workplace is significantly related to job satisfaction and

organizational turnover (Avanzi, Fraccaroli, Sarchielli, Ullrich, & van Rolf, 2014; Cole, 2004; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armelo, & Lynch, 1997; Hill, Chenevert, & Poitras, 2015; Huselid, 1995; Way, Jimmieson, & Bordia, 2014).

In order to pursue this study, three constructs were developed and validated by the author: Quality of Supervision, Productive Climate, and Employee Perception of Value. Finally, and based upon analyses of the extant research literature related to this topic, the following hypothesis statements were developed:

H1: Quality of Supervision is positively related to Employee Perceptions of Value.

H2: Quality of Supervision is positively related to Productive Climate.

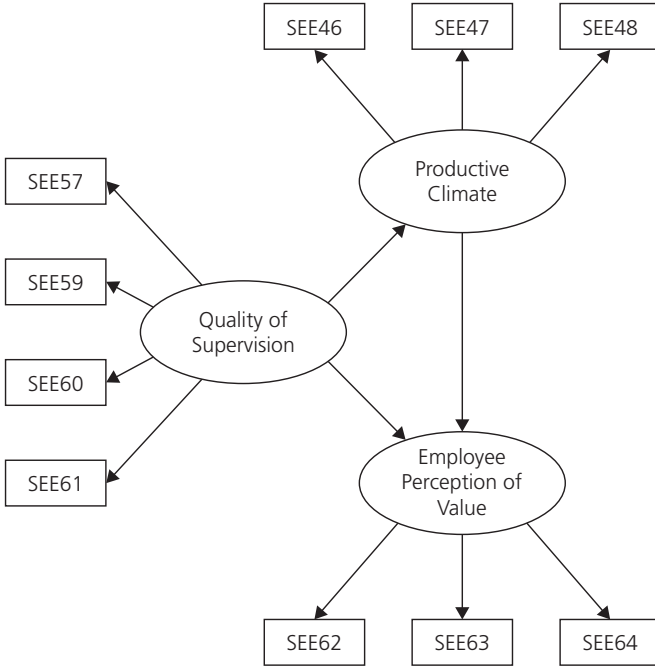
H3: Productive Climate is positively related to Employee Perceptions of Value.

H4: Quality of Supervision, as mediated by Productive Climate, is positively related to Employee Perceptions of Value.

## Methodology

A structural equation model (SEM), located in Figure 1, was used to examine the relationships between the three factors: Quality of Supervision, Productive Climate, and Employee Perception of Value. These factors were conceived, developed, and validated by the author from secondary data derived from the Survey of Employee Engagement (SEE), an instrument used exclusively by the Institute for Organizational Excellence (IOE) which is located on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin. The SEE is intended to assist management at all levels of state government by delivering organization-specific information on issues that could potentially impact the nature and degree of service eventually provided to clients and customers. The scope of the data extends beyond perceptions of organizational effectiveness to the characterization of the quality of the employment relationship that exists between employees and

**Figure 1. Conceptual Structural Equation Model**



*Notes:* Latent constructs are shown in ellipses and observed variables are shown in rectangles. Factors: Quality of Supervision, Productive Climate, and Employee Perception of Value. SEE## represents the specific survey items used in measurement models.

employer. An awareness and appreciation of such issues is critical to the ability to attract and retain a professional, high quality workforce. The instrument’s demographic measures produce both ordinal and nominal data depending on the dichotomous or polytomous nature of the measure. The survey items are polytomous and generate ordinal data utilizing a five-point Likert scale with response categories ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” In 2014, the SEE was administered to employees of the Child Protective Services Division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Some of these records were purged from the study through the use of listwise deletion, which is considered an appropriate method for treating missing data in SEMs (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, &

Tatham, 2006). The records selected for deletion consisted of less than 1% of the original dataset. Regarding these records, either respondents did not complete any of the survey items and simply returned the survey to the investigator, or completed 20% or less of the instrument items. Little’s (1998) test indicated that missing data on Likert items for remaining observations could be regarded as missing completely at random (MCAR). Therefore, single imputation using the expectation–maximization (EM) algorithm was implemented in SPSS to address the remaining missing data cells. The original dataset consisted of 5,720 records and ultimately yielded a study dataset containing 5,684 records. See Table 1 for an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. These data suggest that respondents are disproportionately young, more racially diverse, overwhelmingly female, better educated, and with less service time than Texas public agency employees as a whole.

The latent constructs employed during this study were:

*Quality of Supervision* utilizing the following SEE items as indicator variables in the measurement model: training is made

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic	Measure
Staffing	15.4% Supervisor, 83.7% Staff
Gender	13.2% Male, 83.8% Female
Ethnicity	26.5% Black, 29.0% Hispanic, 40.1% White, .8% Asian, 2.7% Multiracial
Years of service	18.1% Less than 1, 14.3% 1–2, 17.2% 3–5, 24.0% 6–10, 9.7% 11–15, and 15.8% More than 15
Age	19.5% 16–29, 31.4% 30–39, 25.4% 40–49, 17.0% 50–59, 6.1% 60 and older
Education level	1% Did not finish high school, 4.1% High school diploma or GED, 11.0% Some college, 3.4% Associate degree, 60.3% Bachelor’s degree, 20.2% Master’s degree, .6% Doctoral degree

*Note:* Missing data (non-disclosure) accounts for percentages not totaling to 100.

available to me for personal growth and development; upper management effectively communicates important information; I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to give feedback on my supervisor's performance; and I believe we will use the information from this survey to improve our performance.

*Productive Climate* utilizing the following SEE items as indicator variables in the measurement model: I know how my work impacts others in the organization; there is basic trust among employees and supervisors; and I am encouraged to learn from my mistakes.

Supervisor interaction is explored in this construct as well as the Quality of Supervision construct, however, rather than indicators of supervisor performance this item explores the degree of trust that exists between employees and supervisors, a factor that directly influences the quality of the work climate.

*Employee Perception of Value* utilizing the following SEE items as indicator variables in the measurement model: my performance is evaluated fairly; in my workplace, I believe people are generally treated fairly; and my opinions and ideas count at work.

Scale analyses of the constructs were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 18.0 to ascertain the degree of internal consistency among the items utilized as indicator variables in the SEM measurement models. According to Krathwohl (2004), internal consistency reliability serves to substantiate that the items used as indicator variables in a SEM are homogeneous, construct-specific, and correlate highly with each other. Cronbach's Alpha provides consistency reliability measures that range from 0 to 1, with values of .60 to .70 considered the lowest levels of acceptability (Hair et al., 2006). As detailed in Table 2, the study sample provides excellent internal consistency reliability for the factors under investigation.

In addition to an analysis of internal consistency reliability, all items were subjected to factor analysis to assess convergent and discriminant validity. A factor matrix for the constructs appears in Table 3. This table

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics**

Indicator variable	Construct variable	Cronbach's alpha
SEE46 SEE47 SEE48	Productive Climate	.891
SEE57 SEE59 SEE60 SEE61	Quality of Supervision	.935
SEE62 SEE63 SEE64	Employee Perceptions of Value	.892

*Note:* SEE## = survey item.

contains the rotated factor loadings, which represent the weighting of the indicator variables for each construct. Additionally, this table displays the correlations that exist between the indicator variables comprising each measurement model and the associated constructs indicating high correlations between them.

**Table 3. Rotated Factor Matrix**

Construct	Indicator variables	Rotated factor loadings
Quality of Supervision	SEE60	.953
	SEE59	.888
	SEE57	.841
	SEE61	.860
Employee Perception of Value	SEE62	.815
	SEE63	.904
	SEE64	.853
Productive Climate	SEE46	.823
	SEE47	.850
	SEE48	.894

*Notes:* Extraction method was Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation method was Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 4 iterations. SEE## = survey item.

## Data Analysis

The method of analysis employed during this study was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a technique that allows for the analysis of construct variables that cannot be measured directly but does allow for estimation from other directly measured variables (Schreiber, Nora, Stage, Barlow, & King, 2006). SPSS was used to establish the bivariate correlations between the constructs and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software was utilized to construct the study model as well as assess model fit from the program's text outputs. According to Byrne (2010), the use of statistical models is an effective, efficient, and expedient approach to characterize the relationships that underlie a group of directly measured variables. Once constructed, an SEM can provide total, direct and indirect estimates of the correlational relationships that exist between the constructs comprising the model (Hair et al., 2006).

## Results

Regarding goodness of fit (Table 4), while the chi-square and the CMIN (minimum discrepancy)/*df* (degrees of freedom) statistics were high and thus unacceptable, this was very likely due to the large sample size. The CFI (comparative fit index), GFI (goodness-of-fit statistic), NFI (normed-fit index), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) and RMR (root mean square residual) values all indicate good model fit. Finally, at a .05 probability level, the critical N value of 1,238 indicates adequate sample size.

Standardized path coefficients were generated to explore the correlational relationships that exist between the study's predictor and criterion variables. Coefficient of determination ( $r^2$ ) was used to determine degree of practical effect. This analysis provided for the amount of variance shared by the factors and were examined in the context of Cohen's operational definitions of effect sizes for  $r$  (Cohen, 1987). Table 5 contains the standardized and unstandardized effects generated by the study's construct variables as well as standard error.

**Table 4. Goodness-Of-Fit Indices**

Model	$\chi^2$	df	p	CMIN/df	CFI	RMSEA	RMR	GFI	NFI
Default model	212.112	32	<.001	6.629	.996	.031	.018	.993	.995
Saturated model	.000	0			1.000		.000	1.000	1.000
Independence model	41,700.518	45	<.001	926.678	.000	.404	.419	.356	.000

Notes: CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; RMR = root mean square residual; GFI = goodness-of-fit statistic; NFI = normed-fit index.

**Table 5. Standardized Regression Weights and Probabilities**

Hypothesis	Variable relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Probability (P)
1	Employee Perception of Value ← Quality of Supervision	.309 (.212) [.010]			<.001
2	Productive Climate ← Quality of Supervision	.285 (.247) [.012]		.285 (.247)	<.001
3	Employee Perception of Value ← Productive Climate	.227 (.179) [.011]		.227 (.179)	<.001
4	Employee Perceptions of Value ← Productive Climate ← Quality of Supervision		.065 (.044)	.374 (.256)	<.001

Notes: Standardized effects. ( ) Indicates unstandardized effects. [ ] Indicates standard error.

In exploring the first hypothesis, the relationship between the variables Quality of Supervision and Employee Perception of Value, the relationship generated a moderate standardized regression estimate of .31 and achieved statistical significance at a .001 level. The resulting  $r^2$  value of .10 indicates a small practical effect. Regarding the second hypothesis, the effects of Quality of Supervision on Productive Climate, we found the relationship generated a moderate standardized regression estimate of .29 that also achieved statistical significance at a .001 level indicating a predictable and meaningful relationship exists between these two factors. The resulting  $r^2$  value of .08 indicates a small practical effect. The third hypothesis, the effects of Productive Climate on Employee Perception of Value generated a moderate standardized regression estimate of .23 at a .001 level of significance. The resulting  $r^2$  value of .05 indicates a small practical effect. The fourth hypothesis, which explored the total effect of Quality of Supervision on Employee Perception of Value as mediated by Productive Climate, produced a moderate regression estimate of .37 at a .001 level of significance. The resulting  $r^2$  value of .14 indicates a small practical effect.

## Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings, while the relationship between Productive Climate and Employee Perceptions of Value realized a moderate and significant effect, Quality of Supervision as an influencing factor on Employee Perceptions of Value yields a significantly higher effect, particularly when mediated by the Productive Climate construct. As such, the strength of the relationship between Quality of Supervision as perceived by the employee and the quality of the work climate as defined by the study's Productive Climate construct appear to substantially influence employee perceptions of value. This is an important finding given the previously established implications of poor employee self-perception in the workplace. As discussed earlier, prior research indicates that there exists strong correlations between poor value perceptions and higher levels of job dissatisfaction and/or turnover

intention (Avanzi et al., 2014; Cole, 2004; Eisenberger, Cummings, Armelo, & Lynch, 1997; Hill et al., 2015; Huselid, 1995; Michela, 2007; Way et al., 2014).

Interestingly, in exploring the construct relationships for the various populations contained within the dataset, the only interactions that appear to provide even a moderate degree of difference when compared to the overall study involve employees 16–29 years of age when compared to employees over the age of 50, and those employees with less than two years of agency service as compared to those with 11 or more years of service (Table 6). While these relationships are all statistically significant, positive, and moderate in their effects, there are differences worth noting. The effect of the Quality of Supervision construct in relationship to the Employee Perceptions of Value construct is lower in employees aged 16–29 than employees over the age of 50. These younger employees generate a greater effect in the relationship between Productive Climate and Employee Perception of Value. The effect of the Productive Climate construct in relationship to the Employee Perception of Value construct is higher in employees with less than two years of agency service than those employees with 11 or more years of agency service. As these constructs were defined, the findings appear to indicate that younger employees, or those employees with short tenures, are more inclined to associate perceptions of self-value with connectedness in the workplace, the degree of trust that exists between employees and supervisors, and opportunities to learn from errors made in the workplace. Conversely, older employees are more inclined to associate perceptions of self-value with availability of developmental opportunities, effective communication between themselves and management, and their perceptions of the quality of their supervisor's performance. This would suggest that workers who are older are more self-oriented and formulate their self-value perceptions based on factors which directly affect them in the form of development opportunities, information flow, and supervisor competency.

With exceptionally high levels of voluntary turnover unrelated to retirements, employees' perception of value should be an issue of chief

**Table 6. Relationships Between Demographic Characteristics and Construct Variable Interactions**

Category	Quality of Supervision → Productive Climate	Quality of Supervision → Employee Perception of Value	Productive Climate → Employee Perception of Value	Quality of Supervision → Productive Climate → Employee Perception of Value
Overall sample	.285 (.247) [.012]	.309 (.212) [.010]	.227 (.179) [.011]	.065* (.044) .374** (.256)
Employees 16–29 years of age	.319 (.323) [.032]	.284 (.206) [.023]	.289 (.208) [.024]	.092* (.067) .376** (.273)
Employees over the age of 50	.274 (.235) [.025]	.340 (.231) [.020]	.192 (.152) [.023]	.053* (.036) .393** (.267)
Less than 2 years of agency service	.291 (.295) [.025]	.325 (.256) [.019]	.269 (.209) [.019]	.078* (.062) .404** (.318)
11 or more years of agency service	.300 (.246) [.023]	.299 (.182) [.017]	.160 (.118) [.022]	.048* (.029) .347** (.211)

*Notes:* Standardized effects. ( ) Indicates unstandardized effects. [ ] Indicates standard error. \*Indicates indirect effect. \*\*Indicates total effect.

importance to government officials concerned with stemming the transition of experienced workers out of Child Protective Services. To this end, and as suggested by the research findings associated with this study, the effects and importance of quality supervision and the establishment of a productive work climate within an agency cannot be ignored. It appears that efforts made in these areas may encourage improved levels of job satisfaction, which could lead to reduced employee turnover as both are shown to be influenced by employee self-value perceptions. Organizations do have the ability to manage and improve both the quality of their supervision and the nature of their work environment. However, organizational leadership must be willing to invest the necessary resources and implement accountability procedures.

### **Directions for Future Research and Study Limitations**

Researchers should consider investigating whether or not improved levels of employee self-value do, in fact, actually lead to lower levels of voluntary and involuntary turnover within CPS organizations. Also, this research would be greatly complemented by qualitative studies exploring such topics as the generational views of employees that are apparent from this work, as well as qualitative studies intended to provide a better general understanding of employee views and reasoning regarding attitudes toward workplace climate and quality of supervision as related to perceptions of self-value. Finally, it would be instructive to explore the organizational dynamics that appear to encourage a shift in employee attitudes toward a more self-oriented perspective with increasing age.

The data for this study were obtained as secondary data and provided by a survey instrument that was not created for this specific study or purpose. The instrument was regularly administered in the past but data enquiry was strictly limited to less complex statistical analysis. Additionally, while representing less than 1% of the original dataset, records missing 80% or more responses to the survey items were purged from the study dataset utilizing listwise deletion resulting in a loss of some data. It is possible these deletions and data imputations for the

remaining missing data may have inadvertently and unintentionally skewed some of the findings.

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