DIVERSITY AND PRIMARY EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION LEVELS OF EMPLOYEES IN TWO SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES: MYTHS AND REALITIES

June 2015

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ABSTRACT

South African society and workplaces are riddled with challenges related to race, gender, age and political differences, which subsequently created opportunities for the development of numerous related, but mostly unsubstantiated organisational myths. Such myths may cause or contribute to undesirable organisational behaviour forms and outcomes. The primary objective of this paper was therefore to investigate the extent to which a number of demographic variables moderate primary employment relationship satisfaction (PERS) levels of a sample of employees from two South African cities. 545 respondents participated in a voluntarily questionnaire survey. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to investigate the statistical significance of differences in PERS levels of different groupings within the sample group. A number of differences between PERS levels of different sample groups were investigated. Eight myths were dispelled and two realities were identified.

Keywords: myths, employment, relations, satisfaction, supervision, diversity
1. INTRODUCTION

Most employees perceive all of the organisational structures and processes in their employers’ organisation as one interactive humanlike entity with various interlinked components and agents. They refer to these perceptions when they develop general beliefs on the extent to which an employer values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Subordinates in supervisory relationships, however, regard the values and behaviour of their immediate supervisors as the values and behaviour of the employer as a whole. This phenomenon has been described as perceived organisational support (POS) by Shanock & Eisenberger (2006). POS theory strongly suggests that supervisory relationships should be viewed as the primary employment relationship in all types of labour relations environments.

Primary employment relationship satisfaction (PERS) can be defined as a unique type of relationship satisfaction that an individual subordinate derives from positive or negative experiences or perceptions of trust, compliance, fairness and/or good faith in social exchanges with an individual supervisor (Ehlers, 2015). Supervisory behaviour has been found to be significantly related to subordinate job satisfaction, relationship trust levels, perceived employment relationship quality and a variety of employment relationship behaviours. Higher levels of subordinate satisfaction with social conditions and exchanges primary employment relationships, as in the case of higher levels of job satisfaction, should therefore yield numerous employment relations and organisational benefits (Potgieter, 2014; Robbins & Judge, 2013, Tepper, 2007). It has been reported that employees respond negatively to abusive or generally negative supervisor treatment by engaging in behaviour forms that are harmful to the organisation and its members, such as poor work performance, deviant work behaviour or resignation. Positive supervisor treatment, on the other hand, promotes job satisfaction, organisational trust as well as a host of other positive organisational outcomes (Guest, 2004; Robbins & Judge, 2013; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003).
Supervision in South African workplaces, are riddled with challenges related to race, gender and political differences, which subsequently created opportunities for the development of numerous related, but mostly unsubstantiated organisational myths related to workplace behaviour of employees of different gender, race, age, qualification, length of service and union affiliation (Botha & Moalusi, 2010; Guest, 2004, Giancola, 2006, Nancy, 2013). Most of these myths can be regarded as stereotypes that inhibit effective organisational relationships and subsequently the attainment of desired organisational objectives (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2013; Robbins & Judge, 2015). Unfounded myths may also result in breaches of psychological contracts and many forms of workplace grievances and labour disputes (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Shulruf, Woodhams, Howard, Johri & Yee, 2009). Myths could therefore have a positive or negative influence on job satisfaction and PERS levels of employees possessing diverse demographical characteristics.

The primary objective of this study was therefore to test selective hypotheses on the significance of differences in PERS levels of subordinate employees with divergent demographic qualities in two large South African cities, namely Tshwane and Emalahleni, in order to dispel related myths and to confirm related realities. The introductory section is followed by an overview of the research methodology and a literature review on the nature of supervision, psychological contract satisfaction and diversity in the SA labour market. Findings are then discussed and limitations, recommendations and conclusions are reviewed in the final section.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research objective

The primary objective of this paper was to investigate the extent to which a number of demographic variables moderate primary employment relationship (PERS) satisfaction levels of a sample of employees in Tshwane. The first secondary objective was to measure the PERS levels of a sample of employees in Tshwane and Emalahleni, and the second secondary objective was to determine if gender, race, qualification, employment sector, length of service and supervisor relationship,
supervisor gender, supervisor race, language ability and union membership are significant moderators of PERS levels of employees in the sample group.

2.2 Research design and methodology

A pre-experimental survey research design was deemed appropriate for this study, and a quantitative questionnaire survey methodology was consequently adopted. Analysis of literature and research findings were done from a modernist perspective. The following chronological steps were followed in this study (Babbie, 2011; Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2013; Kumar, 2011):

i. This study was conducted in accordance with applicable guidelines for ethical research practices of Industrial Psychologists registered at the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), as well as general ethical guidelines applicable to researchers in South African academic institutions.

ii. The background to the research problem and specific research objectives for the study being reported in this paper were defined. This study formed part of a bigger research project. The bigger project was conducted to investigate a variety of organisational behaviour phenomena in a target population group of an estimated 1.5 million employees, representing around 1.1 million employees in the city of Tshwane and around 400 thousand employees in the city of Emalahleni (Parliament of the RSA, 2014). A literature review on the nature of job satisfaction and the measurement of job satisfaction was conducted and findings were integrated.

iii. Items from a valid and reliable measure of PERS were included in a comprehensive research questionnaire (Ehlers, 2015). This measure contains twenty statements measuring employee satisfaction with trust, compliance, fairness and good faith related behaviour of their immediate supervisors. Content validity of the measure is considered to be far more than adequate in light of the fact that all questionnaire items were derived from a valid typology of desirable social conditions in supervisory relationships. A reported Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of .890 confirmed that the questionnaire items measuring PPERAS levels were adequately reliable and consistent (Ehlers, 2015; Babbie, 2011).
iv. A combination of random and convenience sampling approaches was implemented. A group of twenty primary field workers were briefed on the nature of the comprehensive research study, questionnaire structure, items and all ethical considerations that applied to questionnaire completion. Field workers were requested to approach potential respondents randomly, explain the nature of the research study and to then request all potential respondents to read and accept the ethical compliance statement in the preamble of the questionnaire, before completing the questionnaire. Respondents were specifically informed on the voluntary nature of participation and their unconditional right to refrain from participation, to withdraw during completion of the questionnaire or to withhold the completed questionnaire if they experienced the slightest discomfort in any manner related to the research study.

v. A total of 545 completed questionnaires (400 Tshwane based employees and 145 Emalahleni based employees) were received from field workers within thirty days. The eventual sample size of 545 employees significantly exceeded the suggested random sampling size of 384 for populations larger than one million people if a 5% margin of error will be tolerable (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Table 1 provides an overview of the characteristics of the sample group.

Insert Table 1 about here

vi. Questionnaire data was captured and analysed on a personal computer using SPSS version 14. A variety of general descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were applied to structure data and to investigate the statistical significance of relationships and differences in the dataset. Specific reference to statistical procedures were made in the discussion of significant findings. Literature and research findings were then compared, integrated and discussed, and final conclusions, limitations and recommendations were reported.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections contain discussions of supervision, psychological contracts, primary employment relationship satisfaction, trust, fairness, good faith, workplace diversity and related research findings.
3.1 The nature of supervision

Supervisors play an important part in the functioning of an organisation. They perform the same functions as a manager in their organisation, to a greater or lesser extent. All the roles, responsibilities and tasks that a supervisor has to perform are carried out by the management process, which includes planning, organising, staffing, leading and controlling in order to meet the goals of the organisation.

Supervisors are regarded as managers who report to middle managers. Their responsibility is to get the line employees to carry out the plans and policies set out middle managers and executives. Recently, due to restructuring, increased use of computer-based information systems, a desire to flatten the organisational hierarchy and the growing capacity and desire of many employees to take on greater responsibility results in the shrinking of middle managers in organisations. A supervisor can be defined as a manager who is in charge of and coordinates the activities of a group of employees engaged in related activities within a unit of an organisation.

In order for a supervisor to be successful, he/she should portray certain characteristics. Firstly, a supervisor should have a positive attitude. Employees tend to imitate the attitude of the people in charge. Therefore, employees will be satisfied and interested in their jobs if their supervisor had a positive attitude towards work and the organisation. Successful supervisors should also be loyal, in that, it involves taking decisions that are best for the organisation and may include making decisions that are unpopular with employees. Thirdly, supervisors need to be good communicators, they have to keep their employees and bosses informed on what is happening in the organisation. Fourth, supervisors should be fair and consistent in the decisions they make. Any unfairness or inconsistency can lead to breaches in the psychological contract (Botha & Moalusi, 2010; Isaksson, 2006). Psychological contracts are based on subjective perceptions of trust, honesty, respect, constructivity, consideration, fairness and good faith, and perceived levels of reciprocity plays a central role in the formation of related perceptions (Guest, 2004; Gerlach, Levine, Stephan & Struck, 2007; Rousseau, 1998; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003).
Supervisors must be able to delegate, that is, give their employees authority and responsibilities to carry out activities. Supervisors tend to have excellent technical skills but delegating may be a challenge therefore they need to learn the skill and ability to delegate the tasks to others. Lastly, the supervisor must have a desire or want for the job, in that, some people are happier and more relaxed in carrying out the technical skills in their field and probably will be happier to turn down the opportunity of being a supervisor while others who enjoy the challenge of making plans and inspiring people to achieve their goals are likely to be effective supervisors (Mosely, Pietri & Mosely, 2010; Jamshidi, 2012).

3.2 Primary employment relationship satisfaction (PERS)

Trust, compliance, fairness and good faith are strongly interrelated and can be regarded as desirable social conditions in supervisory relationships (Ehlers, 2013). Related perceptions will stem from relationship expectations and exchanges which occur in the formal and psychological dimensions of employment contracting, and underlie experiences of PERS (Cropanzano, Bowen & Gilliland, 2007; Robbins & Judge, 2011). The following sections provide an overview of the aforementioned conditions.

3.2.1 Trust in primary employment relationships

Trust can be simply defined as the willingness of a party (trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (trustee) based on the expectation that the trustee will perform one or more actions that are important to the trustor, even if the trustor is unable to monitor or control the trustee (Sparrow & Cooper, 2003). Coyle-Shapiro and Shore (2008) concluded that employees with high levels of trust in their organisations are more likely to put greater effort into their roles and co-operate better with others in the workplace, while employees with low levels of trust in their organisations are likely to interact and work less effectively.
3.2.2 Compliance in primary employment relationships

Actual levels of legal or contractual compliance can rarely be objectively assessed by supervisors or subordinates, due to their limited knowledge and understanding of applicable labour laws, contracts and often complicated legal principles (Sparrow & Cooper, 2003). Compliance with legislation, employment contracts or collective agreements, workplace directives and formal procedures provides justifiable reasons for supervisory behaviour and establishes boundaries for harmonious employment relationship behaviour (CCMA, 2011; Tustin & Geldenhuys, 2000:80; Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus & Poisat, 2009; van Wyk, 2002). Holtz and Harold (2009) concluded that there is a strong relationship between overall justice perceptions of employees and organisational trust levels. Research further confirmed that perceived procedural compliance and organisational justice can create powerful mutually beneficial social conditions in employment relationships such as trust and commitment, improved job performance, positive citizenship outcomes, improved customer satisfaction, and diminished conflict in organisational relationships (Cropanzano et al, 2007). Compliance, or perceived compliance is, accordingly, believed to be significantly related to PERS levels of subordinates.

3.2.3 Fairness in primary employment relationships

The duty to act procedurally and substantively fair in employment relationships is relatively clearly defined in South African labour laws and related codes, and is regarded as a generally implied obligation in employment contracts. Fairness expectations, however, are simultaneously rooted in formal and psychological contract dimensions and should be evaluated in the context of the unique relationships in which they exist (Ehlers, 2013; Grogan, 2014; Luthans, 2011; Venter & Levy, 2015). The fairness of any labour practice can, however, be assessed against four basic requirements of fairness. Perceptions of fairness may differ from person to person, but certain neutral and universally accepted standards of fairness can be postulated. Fairness may also be studied from distributive, procedural or interactional justice perspectives (Colquitt, et al, 2001, Cropanzano et al, 2007). Bendix (2010) concluded that an action can only be deemed to be fair if others perceive fairness in the action,
and cited Salamon’s (1987) criteria for evaluating fairness in employment relationships to substantiate her conclusion. These criteria are:

i. There should be reciprocity and balance between the parties concerned.

ii. One party should not obtain all the benefits to the detriment of the other.

iii. There should be an equitable exchange of both substance and behaviours.

iv. Both parties should receive equal treatment and equal consideration in that the same criteria and considerations should apply.

v. The treatment of persons should, as a whole, be consistent.

3.2.4 Good faith in primary employment relationships

The duty to act in good faith in employment relationships is generally implied, but not explicitly defined in South African labour law. Related expectations mostly reside in the psychological contract dimension and can only be evaluated in the context of the unique relationships in which they exist (Shimanskaya, 2010; Venter & Levy, 2015). Good faith can be defined as an honest and sincere intention to create mutual benefit for all parties in a relationship by displaying honest, respectful, considerate and positive behaviour in relationship exchanges (Ehlers, 2013; Heap 2009; Riley, 2009). Bad faith will become evident when dishonesty, disrespect, selfishness or negativity is displayed in relationship exchanges (Ehlers, 2013; Shimanskaya, 2010).

3.3 Summary

The literature review confirmed that supervision behaviour and PERS levels are positively related, and that trust, compliance, fairness and good faith can be regarded as important determinants of PERS levels in supervisory relationships.
4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The average percentage of PERS levels of the 545 respondents were 68.5 percent ($\bar{x} = 65.77$ out of a maximum of 96), which can be regarded as above average. Table 2 reflects the means and statistical significance of differences between the PERS levels of sample groups with different age, gender, race, employment sector, language or union membership characteristics. Only significant differences will be discussed in the following section.

**Insert Table 2 about here**

There is a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.000 \leq 0.05$) between PERS levels of respondents reporting to a supervisor with a similar or lower qualification (A) and respondents reporting to a supervisor with a higher qualification (B). The PERS levels of respondents in Group B ($\bar{x} = 92.63$) were 15.46 percent higher than the PERS levels of respondents in Group A ($\bar{x} = 80.22$). A possible explanation may reside in the fact that respondents with higher qualifications may be occupying more challenging jobs which allows them to be more autonomous, offer better growth and fulfilment opportunities as well as better levels of remuneration (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2013; Robbins & Judge, 2013).

There is a relatively significant difference ($p = 0.068 \leq 0.10$) between PERS levels of respondents aged thirty years or younger (A) and respondents who are older than thirty (B). The PERS levels of respondents in Group A ($\bar{x} = 93.98$) were 4.94 percent higher than the PERS levels of respondents in Group B ($\bar{x} = 89.56$). A possible explanation may reside in the fact that people who communicate fluently in the same language are less at risk to encounter misunderstandings during interpersonal communication exchanges, which may in turn facilitate positive experiences of trust in supervisory relationships (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2013; Robbins & Judge, 2013).

5. MYTHS AND REALITIES

5.1 Myths
This study uncovered no proof that geographical location, age of a subordinate or supervisor, gender of a subordinate or supervisor, race of a subordinate or supervisor, employment sector of a subordinate or supervisor, language ability of a subordinate or supervisor, length of employment, length of a supervisory relationship or union membership is a significant moderator of PERS levels of employees in the sample group. Related assumptions appears to be unfounded and should be regarded as myth.

5.2 Realities

i. This study uncovered statistically significant proof that supervisor qualification is a significant moderator of PERS levels of employees in the sample group. The PERS levels of respondents reporting to a supervisor with a higher qualification were twelve percent higher than those reporting to a supervisor with a similar or lower qualification.

ii. This study uncovered adequate proof that suggests subordinate age should be considered as a relatively significant moderator of PERS levels of employees in the sample group. The PERS levels of respondents who were thirty years old or younger were around four percent higher than those respondents who were older than thirty years.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Limitations

It was previously stated that the sample size of 545 respondents significantly exceeded the suggested random sampling size of 384 for populations larger than one million people if a 5% margin of error will be tolerable (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). However, it should be borne in mind that respondents were not randomly selected and that the sample size may be inadequate for purposes of wider generalization.
Although differences in general PERS levels were investigated, the study did not report on the relationship between PERS levels and levels of intrinsic, extrinsic and general job satisfaction as measured by the Minnesota Satisfactions Questionnaire. It can be reasonably anticipated that significant relationships will be uncovered between the two constructs.

Investigation of differences between sample groups were limited to two groups, even though data would have allowed for investigations of differences between two, three, four or more sample groups. Such investigations would have brought more perspective on differences.

6.2 Recommendations

The present study yielded promising results on the differences between PERS levels between certain sample groups, but fell short of comprehensively identifying and explaining these differences in the context of South African organisations. Non-parametric statistical tests were applied for purposes of investigating differences between two sample groups. The application of a variety of parametric inferential tests could have opened up possibilities for investigating other relationships and differences between different sample groups. It is recommended that additional statistical testing procedures be implemented in order to analyse as many as possible relationships and differences in the PERS levels between two, and more than two sample groups.

6.3 Summary

The primary objective of this paper was to investigate the extent to which a number of demographic variables moderate PERS levels of a sample of employees in Tshwane. PERS levels of a sample of employees in Tshwane and Emalahleni were measured and the validity of a number of alternative hypotheses were investigated. These hypotheses were all related to demographic attributes that could generally be regarded as typical sources of diversity related myths in South African organisations. Eight myths were dispelled and two realities were confirmed, and a number of recommendations were made for related research studies.
LIST OF REFERENCES


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of respondents (n=545)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tshwane</td>
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<td>Emalahleni</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30 and under</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>Qualification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 12 or lower</td>
<td>120</td>
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<td>Public Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union member</td>
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<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a union member</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Statistical significance of differences in PERS levels of respondents

(Independent samples Mann Whitney U-test)

**Probability of significance differences between sample groups = p ≤ .05

*Probability of significance differences between sample groups = p ≤ .10

Ho: There are no differences between the PERS levels of group A and group B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIFFERENTIATOR</th>
<th>GROUP A</th>
<th>GROUP B</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>DECISION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Emalaheni</td>
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<td>n=145, ( \bar{x} = 64.72 )</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Older than 30</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>Retain Ho*</td>
</tr>
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<td>n=262, ( \bar{x} = 67.48 )</td>
<td>n=283, ( \bar{x} = 64.20 )</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>.418</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>n=67, ( \bar{x} = 66.40 )</td>
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<td>5. Qualification</td>
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<td>Higher than Gr12</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Retain Ho</td>
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<td>10 years or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Length of supervisory relationship</td>
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<td>More than 2 years</td>
<td>.537</td>
<td>Retain Ho</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Supervisor Age</td>
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<td>.966</td>
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<td>n=82, ( \bar{x} = 65.67 )</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Retain Ho</td>
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<td>n=244, ( \bar{x} = 63.89 )</td>
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<td>P-value</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Supervisor: Gender B</td>
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<td>65.89</td>
<td>Different</td>
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<td>Supervisor has higher qualification</td>
<td>.000</td>
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