



A meta-analysis of the predictors and consequences of organization-based self-esteem

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Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE), which represents employees' beliefs about their own value and competence *as organizational members*, has attracted much recent research attention. In the current paper, we identified several theoretically based predictors and consequences of OBSE. We then conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationships between OBSE and these variables. Results indicated that several hypothesized predictors, including the work environment and employee dispositions, were related to OBSE. Furthermore, OBSE was related to several hypothesized outcome variables including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee health, job performance, and organizational citizenship behaviour. As expected, OBSE generally yielded stronger relationships with work-related variables than did general self-esteem and we found evidence that OBSE mediated the relationships between general self-esteem and work-related criteria.

Self-esteem plays an important role in predicting employee attitudes and behaviours (Brockner, 1988; Judge & Bono, 2001; Korman, 1970, 1976; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Much of this research has examined *general* self-esteem, which represents an individual's *overall* belief about his or her self-worth and competence. Some scholars, however, have argued that self-esteem should be conceptualized as a hierarchical construct and that individuals may have different self-perceptions of their worth and competence across different roles (Korman, 1970; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995; Simpson & Boyle, 1975). An individual may feel highly valued and competent as a spouse or as a student, for example, but feel less valued and competent as an employee.

In recognition of the potential advantages of using role-specific personality traits, Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham (1989) introduced a construct they called organization-based self-esteem (OBSE; for qualitative reviews of this construct see Levy, Cober, & Norris-Watts, 2003; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). OBSE differs from general conceptualizations of self-esteem in that it refers to one's belief about his or her self-worth and competence *as an organizational member*. That is, rather than taking a

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general view of self-esteem, OBSE considers one's self-evaluations specifically within the context of the workplace. The current study provides a quantitative review of OBSE and compares the potential predictors and consequences of OBSE with those of general self-esteem. These analyses draw from recent research and theory on frame-of-reference effects in personality assessment (Bing, Whanger, Davison, & VanHook, 2004; Hunthausen, Truxillo, Bauer, & Hammer, 2003; Lievens, Decorte, & Schollaert, 2008; Schmit, Ryan, Stierwalt, & Powell, 1995), which hypothesizes different relationships for general and role-specific personality traits.

We should note that the current study builds upon prior qualitative reviews (Levy *et al.*, 2003; Pierce & Gardner, 2004) in several different ways. First, the use of meta-analysis permits us to quantitatively examine the OBSE literature. This has benefit of allowing us to account for the effects of statistical artifacts, such as sampling error and measurement error. Second, the current study includes samples that were not included in the qualitative reviews. These include a number of unpublished dissertations and articles published subsequent to the two qualitative reviews. Third, we examine variables that received little or no attention in previous qualitative reviews of OBSE, such as employee health and demographics. Finally, we conduct analyses comparing relationships for OBSE with those of general self-esteem.

In the following section, we review research and theory on the dispositional and work-related predictors of OBSE. We then consider the relationships between OBSE and outcome variables, such as job attitudes, performance, and employee health. Finally, we compare OBSE's and general self-esteem's relationships with these predictor and criterion variables and we examine OBSE as a mediator of the relationships between general self-esteem and work-related criteria.

Hypothesized predictors of OBSE

Previous theorizing has identified several potential predictors of OBSE. These variables, which included both employee personality and the work environment, are reviewed below.

Dispositional predictors

Individuals who believe themselves to be worthy and valuable in general are likely to believe that they are worthy and valuable in specific settings, such as the workplace (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989). Indeed, as briefly discussed above, general self-esteem is often conceptualized as a higher-order construct of which OBSE is one of many situation-specific sub-dimensions (Korman, 1970, 1976). This conceptualization implies that general self-esteem has a causal effect on one's level of OBSE (Chen, Goddard, & Casper, 2004). Furthermore, the fact that an individual's level of general self-esteem exists prior to employment and that OBSE develops only after one joins a given organization clearly indicates the temporal priority of general self-esteem. This unidirectional relationship may be present only among organizational newcomers, however. That is, given their limited experience with their employer, the OBSE of new employees may be based largely on their level of general self-esteem. Once employees have worked in a given organization for a sufficient amount of time, however, OBSE is likely to be influenced less by general self-esteem and more by personal experiences within the organization. Because work represents an important aspect in the lives of most employees (Rice, Near, & Hunt, 1980;

Robinson, 1977), one's level of OBSE could actually have a causal effect on general self-esteem. Thus, the relationship between general self-esteem and OBSE may be reciprocal (Pierce & Gardner, 2004).

In addition to general self-esteem, other general personality traits are also likely to be predictors of OBSE. First, it is likely that individuals who believe themselves to be competent in general will also tend to believe themselves to be competent at work (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989). This suggests that general self-efficacy is an antecedent of OBSE. Emotional stability is another general personality trait that is potentially an antecedent of OBSE. Specifically, since emotionally stable individuals tend to view themselves as valuable and competent in general (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998), they are likely to view themselves as valuable and competent members of their work organization.

Hypothesis 1: Positive relationships will exist between OBSE and (a) general self-esteem, (b) general self-efficacy, and (c) emotional stability.

Situational predictors

Several studies have examined the potential situational predictors of OBSE. Specifically, theorists have argued that favourable and unfavourable aspects of the work environment implicitly signal to employees the extent to which they are valued, respected, and trusted by their organization (Korman, 1970, 1976; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). The presence of high work autonomy and job complexity, for example, implies to employees that the organization sees them as willing and able to perform effectively (although autonomy is generally treated as a sub-dimension of job complexity (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), we examined them separately because several studies in our database did so). Likewise, the presence of supportive management and high salaries suggests to employees that they are worthy and valued.

In addition to the implicit cues contained in one's work environment, interpersonal interactions with supervisors, co-workers, subordinates, and customers may result in more direct or explicit signals about one's worth to the organization (Baumeister, 1999; Brockner, 1988; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). That is, other people at work may directly tell employees the extent to which they are valued by their employer. These explicit messages can be internalized by the target person thus impacting his or her level of OBSE.

Finally, given that the amount of success one experiences at work is expected to contribute to OBSE (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), any environmental condition that impairs job performance is likely to negatively affect OBSE. Work stressors, such as role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, and job insecurity, for example, are expected to have such effects on OBSE because they interfere with successful job performance. On the other hand, environmental conditions that facilitate job success, such as the presence of supportive management, may increase OBSE.

In sum, the work environment may impact OBSE by either influencing the implicit cues or explicit cues that employees receive about their competence and value to the organization or it may impact OBSE by influencing the success that one experiences at work (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). We should note that similar process have been theorized as antecedents of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1997).

Hypothesis 2: Positive relationships will exist between OBSE and (a) job complexity, (b) autonomy, (c) effective leader behaviours, (d) social and organizational support,

(e) psychological ownership, and (f) salary, whereas negative relationships will exist between OBSE and (g) general job stressors, (h) role ambiguity, (i) role conflict, (j) role overload, and (k) job insecurity.

Hypothesized consequences of OBSE

Employee attitudes

Several studies have examined job attitudes as potential consequences of OBSE. Much of this research has been guided by self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970), which shares many similarities with cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), status congruency theory (Sampson, 1963), and balance theory (Heider, 1958). According to self-consistency theory, people are motivated to maintain a consistent level of self-esteem. Thus, high self-esteem individuals generally behave in ways that maintain their positive views of themselves, whereas low self-esteem individuals generally behave in ways that maintain their negative views of themselves. In the context of the workplace, high self-esteem workers can maintain their self-perceptions by developing positive job attitudes, whereas low self-esteem workers can maintain their self-perceptions by developing negative job attitudes (Pierce *et al.*, 1989). This may suggest a causal link from OBSE to job attitudes, which is consistent with previous theorizing (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). We should note, however, that it is possible that employees may adjust their levels of OBSE to be consistent with their job attitudes. One may respond to job dissatisfaction, for example, by decreasing her level of OBSE. Similar processes may also occur for affective and normative organizational commitment and job involvement, but are less likely to occur for continuance organizational commitment, because this later attitude is largely the product of available job opportunities and the benefits incurred from one's current employer (Meyer & Allen, 1997). As a whole, the above arguments suggest that the OBSE-job attitude relationship may be reciprocal.

Hypothesis 3: OBSE will yield positive relationships with (a) job satisfaction, (b) affective and normative organizational commitment, and (c) job involvement.

Employee behaviour and behavioural intentions

In addition to examining job attitudes, researchers have also examined both in-role and extra role performance as a potential consequence of OBSE. This research generally yields positive relationships between OBSE and performance (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). These findings can be interpreted as supporting self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970). Specifically, performing one's job effectively is one way in which high self-esteem individuals can maintain their positive self-perceptions, whereas performing poorly is one way in which low self-esteem individuals can maintain their negative self-perceptions. Furthermore, OBSE may influence performance via effects on self-efficacy. As discussed above, OBSE is expected to be related to self-efficacy, which in turn has been linked with performance (Bandura, 1997; Judge & Bono, 2001).

We also expect that OBSE will be negatively related to turnover intention. This relationship may be mediated by job attitudes. As detailed in the previous section, OBSE is expected to be positively related to both job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These two attitudes, in turn, are strongly associated with turnover intention (Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Hypothesis 4: OBSE will yield positive relationships with (a) job performance and (b) organizational citizenship behaviour, and a negative relationship with (c) turnover intentions.

Employee health

Research has found that general self-esteem consistently yields negative relationships with employee mental and physical illness. General self-esteem, for example, is negatively related to anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms (Frone, 2000; Kivimaki & Kalimo, 1996; Spector & Jex, 1998). One interpretation of these findings is that general self-esteem serves as a resource that protects employees from the negative effects of the work stressors (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). More specifically, general self-esteem may influence one's health by impacting beliefs about one's ability to cope with and control stressful environmental conditions or it may affect whether one interprets a particular environmental condition as a threat or as a challenge (Kivimaki & Kalimo, 1996; Schuler, 1980). For these same reasons, it is expected that OBSE will yield negative relationships with mental and physical illness.

Hypothesis 5: OBSE will yield negative relationships with (a) depression and (b) physical symptoms.

Self-esteem and frame-of-references effects

Because it addresses employees' self-perceptions of their worth and competence *at work*, OBSE is expected to yield relatively stronger relationships with work-related variables than does general self-esteem (Chen *et al.*, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998). This is consistent with the findings of recent research on frame-of-reference effects in personality measurement (see Bing *et al.*, 2004; Hunthausen *et al.*, 2003; Lievens *et al.*, 2008; Schmit *et al.*, 1995). That research has consistently found that contextualized personality measures that ask participants how they behave 'at work' yield stronger relationships with work-related criteria than do personality measures that ask participants how they behave in general. Hunthausen *et al.* (2003), for example, found a correlation of .31 between a contextualized measure of conscientiousness and job performance, but a correlation of only .10 between a general measure of conscientiousness and job performance.

Frame-of-reference researchers have given several explanations for why contextualized personality measures are more strongly related to work-related criteria than are general personality measures (Lievens *et al.*, 2008). First, contextualized measures require all participants to use a common frame-of-reference when completing personality measures. This occurs because contextualized measures specify the particular frame-of-reference that is to be used when interpreting personality items, such as 'at work' or 'at school'. General measures, on the other hand, do not provide a common frame-of-reference for all participants. Thus, when completing a general personality measure, different participants may choose different frames-of-reference. When completing a general measure, for example, one participant may consider the way she behaves in her social life, whereas another participant may consider the way she behaves as an employee. This between-subjects variability in item interpretation is expected to have a negative effect on the reliability and validity of general personality measures (Bing *et al.*, 2004).

A second possibility is that the use of general personality measures results in within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation (Lievens *et al.*, 2008). In other words, a participant who is completing a general personality measure may use different frames-of-reference when responding to different items. When responding to a general measure, for example, one may answer the first item by considering how she behaves as

a parent, but may respond to the second item by considering how she behaves as an employee. Contextualized personality measures, on the other hand, reduce the possibility that participants will change their frames-of-reference. If participants are asked to report how they behave 'at work' for example, it is likely that they will stick to this work frame-of-reference and will not consider how they behave in other domains, such as in their social lives or at school. This reduction in within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation is expected to enhance the reliability and validity of contextualized personality measures (Lievens *et al.*, 2008).

A final possibility is that contextualized personality measures that ask participants how they behave 'at work' yield especially strong relationships with work-related criteria because these measures have more conceptual overlap with the criteria than do general measures (Lievens *et al.*, 2008). Indeed, the use of contextualized measures has been found to improve predictive validity only when the frame-of-reference used is relevant to the criteria being studied. Using college grade point average as their criterion, Lievens *et al.* (2008), for example, found increased validity for contextualized measures asking participants how they behave 'at school', but the contextualized measures asking participants how they behave 'at work' had validities that were similar to those of general measures.

The above research has clear implications for the study of OBSE. That is, less between-subject variability and within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation is expected to be present in measures of OBSE than in measures of general self-esteem. This is expected to occur because measures of OBSE specify the domain that respondents are to consider when completing the items. Furthermore, OBSE is conceptually more relevant for the prediction of work-related criteria than is general self-esteem (Chen *et al.*, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998). For these reasons, OBSE is expected to yield especially strong relationships with work-related variables.

Hypothesis 6: OBSE will yield stronger relationships with work-related variables (i.e., favourable and unfavourable working conditions, job attitudes, and employee behaviour and behavioural intentions) than will general self-esteem.

Mediation effects of OBSE

Above, we suggested that general self-esteem is a hierarchical construct and that OBSE is a context-specific sub-facet of general self-esteem (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989). This suggests that general self-esteem and OBSE will be positively related to each other. Consistent with prior research, we also suggested that OBSE would yield stronger relationship with work-related criteria than would general self-esteem (Chen *et al.*, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989; Tang & Ibrahim, 1998). The latter hypothesis is supported by the literature on frame-of-reference effects (Bing *et al.*, 2004; Hunthausen *et al.*, 2003; Lievens *et al.*, 2008; Schmit *et al.*, 1995).

This set of hypothesized relationships suggests that any zero-order associations between general self-esteem and work-related criteria will likely be weakened after OBSE is controlled and that OBSE yields stronger unique relationship with work-related criteria than does general self-esteem. As a whole, this suggests that OBSE may mediate the effects of general self-esteem on work-related criteria (Chen *et al.*, 2004; Gardner & Pierce, 1998). Indeed, other researchers have used a similar argument to suggest that work-specific measures of Big Five characteristics mediate the effects of general Big Five characteristics on job attitudes (Heller, Ferris, Brown, & Watson, 2009).

Hypothesis 7: OBSE will mediate the relationships between general self-esteem and work-related consequences.

OBSE and broadly assessed criteria

Although OBSE is expected to yield stronger relationships with work-related variables than is general self-esteem, it may yield relatively weaker relationships with broad non-work variables. This prediction is based on the bandwidth–fidelity principle (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996; Roberts & Donahue, 1994; Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1996; Tett, Steele, & Beauregard, 2003) and the principle of compatibility (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005), which predict that two variables will be most strongly related to each other when both are assessed at the same level of specificity. That is, broad personality constructs are expected to yield especially strong relationships with broad criteria and narrow personality constructs are expected to yield especially strong relationships with narrow criteria. Because general self-esteem is relatively broader than is OBSE, it is thus expected to yield relatively stronger relationships with broad criteria.

Hypothesis 8: General self-esteem will yield stronger relationships with employee health than will OBSE.

Exploratory analyses

We also conducted exploratory analyses examining demographic differences in OBSE. These analyses, which explored relationships for age, gender, tenure, and education, were not based on any *a priori* theory.

Method

We used meta-analysis (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004) to examine the hypothesized antecedents and consequences of OBSE. We also conducted meta-analysis to examine the relationships between the antecedent and outcome variables and general self-esteem so that these results could be compared with those of OBSE. Below we discuss the literature search strategies and the analytic methods used to conduct the meta-analysis.

Literature search

Organization-based self-esteem

We searched the PsycINFO and EBSCO computer databases using the following key terms: *organizational-based self-esteem*, *organizational based self-esteem*, *organization-based self-esteem*, *organization based self-esteem*, and *OBSE*. In addition, we searched Google Scholar for studies that included any of the aforementioned key terms as well as for studies that cited the seminal OBSE article (i.e., Pierce *et al.*, 1989). Both published articles and unpublished dissertations were included in this search. Because dissertations were not collected for general self-esteem (see the following sub-section), analyses were conducted both with and without the unpublished dissertations. These analyses found similar results for OBSE regardless of whether or not dissertations were included. Some samples were excluded because the OBSE measure included items that did not appear to be face valid (e.g., Wiesenfeld, Brockner, and Thibault (2000) was excluded because the measure used to assess OBSE included the apparent locus of control item, ‘I am generally able to control the

important things that happen to me at work.') or because OBSE was assessed in a non-work context (Graham & Van Dyne, 2006). A final total of 57 samples from published articles and nine from doctoral dissertations were included in the meta-analyses. The samples primarily consisted of employees from the USA (19 of the 66 samples included employees who worked outside of the USA).

General self-esteem

We searched the PsycINFO and EBSCO computer databases using the key term *self-esteem* and each of the antecedent and criterion variables. Because of the large amount of research on general self-esteem (see Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Mruk, 2006), searches utilizing Google Scholar and the inclusion of unpublished dissertations was not practical. Previous studies were also located using previous meta-analyses examining the relationship between general self-esteem and job involvement (Brown, 1996), job satisfaction (Judge & Bono, 2001), and in-role performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). Meta-analyses were not conducted for the relationships between general self-esteem and leader initiating structure, leader consideration, perceived organizational support, psychological ownership, and continuance commitment because of a lack of primary studies. Our search yielded 101 samples that were included in the meta-analyses on general self-esteem.

Meta-analytic strategy

We used Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) method to conduct the meta-analyses. Each correlation was corrected for unreliability and weighted by the study's sample size. Artifact distributions were used to replace missing reliability data. We used Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy's (1997) meta-analytic estimate to correct for unreliability in single-item job attitude measures and Viswesvaran, Ones, and Schmidt's (1996) meta-analytic inter-rater reliability estimate to correct for unreliability in supervisor ratings of in-role job performance and organizational citizenship behaviour. We also used Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) method to calculate standard deviations of the corrected and uncorrected correlations, 95% confidence intervals, and 80% credibility intervals. The confidence intervals are useful for testing the statistical significance of our mean correlations, whereas the credibility intervals are useful for detecting whether inconsistencies across primary studies are due to statistical artifacts (Whitener, 1990).

Results

Hypothesized predictors

We hypothesized that general self-esteem (Hypothesis 1a), general self-efficacy (Hypothesis 1b), and emotional stability (Hypothesis 1c) would each be positively related to OBSE. As shown in Table 1, these hypotheses were supported. Specifically, we found corrected correlations of .49 for general self-esteem ($k = 9$, $N = 1,532$), .37 for general self-efficacy ($k = 3$, $N = 1,018$), and .11 for emotional stability ($k = 5$, $N = 1,590$).

We also hypothesized that several environmental variables would be related to OBSE, including job complexity (Hypothesis 2a), autonomy (Hypothesis 2b), effective leader behaviours (Hypothesis 2c), social and organizational support (Hypothesis 2d), psychological ownership (Hypothesis 2e), salary (Hypothesis 2f), general job stressors

Table 1. Relationships between organization-based self-esteem and general personality traits

Variable	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	Mean <i>r</i>	<i>SD_r</i>	Mean ρ	<i>SD_{\rho}</i>	80% Credibility interval	95% Confidence interval
General self-esteem	9	1,532	.40	0.13	.49	0.16	.28, .70	.31, .49
General self-efficacy	3	1,018	.32	0.05	.37	0.06	.28, .46	.26, .38
Emotional stability	5	1,590	.10	0.08	.11	0.09	-.02, .24	.02, .18

Note. *k*, number of samples; *N*, total sample size; Mean *r*, average weighted correlation coefficient; Mean ρ , average weighted correlation coefficient corrected for unreliability in the predictor and criterion.

(Hypothesis 2g), role ambiguity (Hypothesis 2h), role conflict (Hypothesis 2i), role overload (Hypothesis 2j), and job insecurity (Hypothesis 2k). We found support for each of these hypotheses with the exception of Hypothesis 2j (see Table 2). Specifically, our analyses suggest that job complexity ($\rho = .60$, $k = 7$, $N = 2,414$), autonomy ($\rho = .42$, $k = 7$, $N = 2,254$), leader initiating structure ($\rho = .58$, $k = 4$, $N = 953$), leader-member exchange ($\rho = .55$, $k = 3$, $N = 1,121$), leader consideration ($\rho = .43$, $k = 5$, $N = 1,120$), perceived organizational support ($\rho = .59$, $k = 6$, $N = 883$), supervisor social support ($\rho = .40$, $k = 4$, $N = 1,651$), co-worker social support ($\rho = .31$, $k = 2$, $N = 1,624$), psychological ownership ($\rho = .59$, $k = 3$, $N = 822$), and salary ($\rho = .15$, $k = 8$, $N = 2,451$) were positively associated with OBSE. Furthermore, negative working conditions, such as general job stressors ($\rho = -.42$, $k = 4$, $N = 964$), role ambiguity ($\rho = -.41$, $k = 4$, $N = 1,411$), role conflict ($\rho = -.23$, $k = 5$, $N = 723$), and job insecurity ($\rho = -.44$, $k = 7$, $N = 2,783$) each yielded negative relationships with OBSE. Unexpectedly, however, role overload and OBSE were essentially unrelated ($\rho = .01$, $k = 2$, $N = 859$).

Hypothesized consequences of OBSE

We hypothesized that OBSE would yield positive relationships with job satisfaction (Hypothesis 3a), organizational commitment (Hypothesis 3b), and job involvement (Hypothesis 3c). As shown in Table 3, OBSE was generally related to these hypothesized outcome variables. Specifically, OBSE was significantly associated with job satisfaction ($\rho = .57$, $k = 34$, $N = 10,362$), organizational commitment ($\rho = .55$, $k = 24$, $N = 8,403$), affective commitment ($\rho = .60$, $k = 12$, $N = 2,152$), and job involvement ($\rho = .48$, $k = 2$, $N = 359$), but was not significantly associated with either normative commitment or continuance commitment which is indicated by the fact that their confidence intervals included zero. Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3c were completely supported, whereas Hypothesis 3b was only partially supported.

We also hypothesized that OBSE would be positively related to in-role job performance (Hypothesis 4a), organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs; Hypothesis 4b), and negatively related to turnover intention (Hypothesis 4c). These hypotheses were supported (see Table 3). Specifically, we found that OBSE yielded a corrected correlation of .34 with in-role performance ($k = 12$, $N = 2,020$), .38 with OCBs ($k = 14$, $N = 4,069$), and $-.44$ with turnover intentions ($k = 11$, $N = 3,180$).

Finally, we hypothesized that OBSE would be negatively associated with depression (Hypothesis 5a) and physical symptoms (Hypothesis 5b). As shown in Table 3, these hypotheses were supported. Specifically, we found that OBSE yielded a corrected

Table 2. Meta-analyses for potential work environment predictors of OBSE and general self-esteem

Variable	Organization-based self-esteem										General self-esteem									
	Mean					Mean					SD _r	SD _p	80% Credibility interval	95% Confidence interval						
	k	N	r	ρ	SD _r	k	N	r	ρ	SD _r										
Job complexity	7	2,414	.48	.60	0.00	0.00	.60	.60	.48	.48	2	514	.18	.21	0.00	0.00	.21	.21	.18	.18
Autonomy	7	2,254	.35	.42	0.07	0.08	.30	.54	.29	.41	8	3,498	.18	.23	0.05	0.06	.16	.30	.14	.22
Leader initiating structure	4	953	.43	.58	0.12	0.17	.36	.80	.31	.55										
Leader-member exchange	3	1,121	.49	.55	0.11	0.12	.38	.72	.36	.62	3	494	.13	.16	0.02	0.02	.13	.19	.10	.16
Leader consideration	5	1,120	.37	.43	0.03	0.09	.31	.55	.34	.40										
Organizational support	6	883	.53	.59	0.15	0.16	.38	.80	.40	.66										
Supervisor social support	4	1,651	.36	.40	0.00	0.00	.40	.40	.36	.36	4	1,009	.19	.25	0.03	0.04	.20	.30	.16	.22
Co-worker social support	2	1,624	.27	.31	0.01	0.00	.31	.31	.25	.29	3	422	.21	.31	0.11	0.16	.11	.51	.08	.34
Psychological ownership	3	822	.52	.59	0.01	0.01	.56	.62	.50	.54										
Salary	8	2,451	.14	.15	0.07	0.07	.05	.25	.09	.19	9	5,014	.12	.14	0.11	0.13	-.02	.30	.04	.20
General job stressors	4	964	-.36	-.42	0.05	0.11	-.56	-.28	-.41	-.31	12	2,984	-.24	-.31	0.13	0.17	-.53	-.09	-.32	-.16
Role ambiguity	4	1,411	-.34	-.41	0.14	0.17	-.63	-.19	-.48	-.20	10	1,874	-.16	-.21	0.09	0.12	-.36	.06	-.22	-.10
Role conflict	5	723	-.19	-.23	0.13	0.16	-.44	-.02	-.31	-.07	11	1,898	-.08	-.10	0.18	0.24	-.41	.21	-.19	.03
Role overload	2	859	.01	.01	0.00	0.00	.01	.01	.01	.01	3	859	-.21	-.24	0.00	0.00	-.24	-.24	-.21	-.21
Job insecurity	7	2,783	-.37	-.44	0.03	0.03	-.47	-.40	-.40	-.34	2	513	-.24	-.30	0.00	0.00	-.30	.30	-.24	-.24

Note. k, number of samples; N, total sample size; Mean r, average weighted correlation coefficient; Mean ρ, average weighted correlation coefficient corrected for unreliability in the predictor and criterion. Some analyses for general self-esteem are missing due to a lack of primary studies.

Table 3. Meta-analyses for potential consequences of OBSE and general self-esteem

Variable	Organization-based self-esteem										General self-esteem																										
	Mean					Mean					Mean					Mean																					
	k	N	r	ρ	SD_r	SD_ρ	80% Credibility interval	95% Confidence interval	k	N	r	ρ	SD_r	SD_ρ	80% Credibility interval	95% Confidence interval	k	N	r	ρ	SD_r	SD_ρ	80% Credibility interval	95% Confidence interval													
Job satisfaction	34	10,362	.47	.57	0.08	0.09	.45, .69	.44, .50	33	11,792	.24	.29	0.12	0.15	.10, .48	.20, .28	24	8,403	.48	.55	0.09	0.10	.43, .68	.44, .51	11	3,201	.24	.32	0.07	0.08	.22, .42	.20, .28					
Organizational commitment	12	2,152	.51	.60	0.07	0.08	.49, .71	.47, .55	3	2,489	.35	.46	0.03	0.02	.43, .49	.32, .38																					
Affective commitment	2	282	.18	.21	0.31	0.33	-.23, .65	-.25, .61	2	291	-.01	-.01	0.00	0.00	-.01, -.01	-.01, -.01																					
Normative commitment	4	468	.22	.27	0.25	0.31	-.13, .67	-.03, .47																													
Continuance commitment	2	359	.39	.48	0.07	0.04	.42, .54	.29, .49	12	3,330	.10	.13	0.16	0.21	-.14, .40	.00, .20																					
Job involvement	12	2,020	.23	.34	0.11	0.17	.11, .57	.16, .30	17	3,441	.12	.18	0.12	0.18	-.05, .41	.06, .18																					
In-role performance	14	4,069	.31	.38	0.15	0.19	.13, .63	.23, .39	3	585	.41	.58	0.07	0.09	.46, .70	.33, .49																					
OCBs	11	3,180	-.37	-.44	0.06	0.06	-.53, -.35	-.41, -.33	11	5,479	-.17	-.21	0.06	0.07	-.31, -.11	-.21, -.13																					
Turnover intention	2	432	-.46	-.51	0.06	0.06	-.60, -.42	-.55, -.37	20	12,006	-.42	-.52	0.06	0.04	-.58, -.46	-.46, -.40																					
Depression	2	1,525	-.24	-.28	0.00	0.00	-.28, -.28	-.24, -.24	17	12,108	-.18	-.21	0.16	.19	-.46, .04	-.26, -.10																					
Physical symptoms																																					

Note. k, number of samples; N, total sample size; Mean r, average weighted correlation coefficient; Mean ρ , average weighted correlation coefficient corrected for unreliability in the predictor and criterion; OCBs, organizational citizenship behaviours. Some analyses for general self-esteem are missing due to a lack of primary studies.

correlation of $-.51$ with depression ($k = 2$, $N = 432$) and $-.28$ with physical symptoms ($k = 2$, $N = 1,525$).

Comparisons between OBSE and general self-esteem with work-related variables

Analyses reported in Tables 2 and 3 were used to compare the relationships between OBSE and the work-related variables with the relationships between general self-esteem and the work-related variables. An absence of overlap between the confidence intervals for OBSE and the confidence intervals for general self-esteem indicates a statistically significant difference in effects sizes.

These analyses generally supported Hypothesis 6, which predicted that OBSE would be more strongly related to work-related variables than would general self-esteem. Compared with general self-esteem, OBSE yielded significantly stronger relationship with job complexity (ρ for OBSE = $.60$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.21$), autonomy (ρ for OBSE = $.42$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.23$), leader-member exchange (ρ for OBSE = $.55$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.16$), supervisor social support (ρ for OBSE = $.40$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.25$), job insecurity (ρ for OBSE = $-.44$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.30$), job satisfaction (ρ for OBSE = $.57$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.29$), organizational commitment (ρ for OBSE = $.55$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.32$), affective commitment (ρ for OBSE = $.60$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.46$), job involvement (ρ for OBSE = $.48$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.13$), and turnover intention (ρ for OBSE = $-.44$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.21$).

Although OBSE yielded stronger relationships with salary (ρ for OBSE = $.15$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.14$), general job stressors (ρ for OBSE = $-.42$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.31$), role ambiguity (ρ for OBSE = $-.41$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.21$), role conflict (ρ for OBSE = $-.23$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.10$), normative commitment (ρ for OBSE = $.21$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.01$), and in-role job performance (ρ for OBSE = $.34$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.18$) than did general self-esteem, the overlapping confidence intervals indicate that these differences in effect sizes were not statistically significant. Unexpectedly, general self-esteem yielded a significantly stronger relationship with role overload than did OBSE (ρ for OBSE = $.01$; ρ for general self-esteem = $-.24$), while the analyses for co-worker social support (ρ for OBSE = $.31$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.31$) and OCBs (ρ for OBSE = $.38$; ρ for general self-esteem = $.58$) yielded effects sizes for OBSE and general self-esteem that were not significantly different. In sum, 10 of these 19 analyses comparing OBSE and general self-esteem were statistically significant in the direction that we hypothesized. Only one statistically significant analysis was in the opposite of the expected direction.

Mediation analyses

We used LISREL (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996) to conduct path analyses examining OBSE as a mediator of the relationships between general self-esteem and work-related criteria (see Hypothesis 7). The correlation matrices used in these analyses consisted of the corrected correlation between OBSE and general self-esteem reported in Table 1 and the corrected correlations between OBSE and work-related criteria and general self-esteem and work-related criteria reported in Table 3.

Table 4 reports the effect proportion mediated (P_M ; Shrout & Bolger, 2002), which indicates the proportion of *overall* effect of general self-esteem on the criterion variable that is mediated through OBSE. Specifically, we used LISREL (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1996)

Table 4. Analyses examining OBSE as a mediator of the effects of general self-esteem on work-related criteria

Criterion variable	β for OBSE	β for General self-esteem	P_M	N
Job satisfaction	0.56*	0.01	.96	3,596
Organizational commitment	0.52*	0.07*	.78	2,799
Affective commitment	0.49*	0.22*	.52	1,974
Normative commitment	0.28*	-0.15*	-	392
Job involvement	0.55*	-0.14*	-	802
In-role performance	0.33*	0.02	.88	2,085
OCBs	0.13*	0.52*	.10	1,150
Turnover intention	-0.44*	0.01	-	2,609

Note. * $p < .01$. P_M , effect proportion mediated (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). OCBs, organizational citizenship behaviour. N was computed using the harmonic mean (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1995). Some P_M are not reported due to the presence of suppressor effects.

to compute both the total effects of general self-esteem on the criterion variables as well as the indirect effects of general self-esteem that were mediated by OBSE. The P_M statistic is simply the ratio of indirect effects over total effects.

As shown in the table, OBSE explains much of the effects of general self-esteem on job satisfaction ($P_M = .96$), organizational commitment ($P_M = .78$), affective commitment ($P_M = .52$), and in-role performance ($P_M = .88$), but it explains only a small amount of the effects of general self-esteem on OCBs ($P_M = .10$). We should note that we were unable to compute similar analyses for normative commitment, job involvement, and turnover intention due to the presence of suppressor effects (suppression occurs when the direct and indirect effects are not of the same sign; see Shrout & Bolger, 2002). That is, P_M can exceed 1.00 or become negative when suppression is present, thus making the interpretation of the statistic ambiguous.

We also examined the unique effects of OBSE and general self-esteem on the work-related criteria (see Table 4). Analyses for job satisfaction (β for OBSE = .56; β for general self-esteem = .01), organizational commitment (β for OBSE = .52; β for general self-esteem = .07), affective commitment (β for OBSE = .49; β for general self-esteem = .22), normative commitment (β for OBSE = .28; β for general self-esteem = -.15), job involvement (β for OBSE = .55; β for general self-esteem = -.14), in-role performance (β for OBSE = .33; β for general self-esteem = .02), and turnover intention (β for OBSE = -.44; β for general self-esteem = .01) yielded stronger unique effects for OBSE than for general self-esteem. On the other hand, general self-esteem yielded a stronger unique relationship with OCBs than did OBSE (β for OBSE = .13; β for general self-esteem = .52).

Comparisons between OBSE and general self-esteem with broadly assessed criteria

Table 3 presents analyses testing whether general self-esteem yielded stronger relationships with general health outcomes than did OBSE (Hypothesis 8). Contrary to our hypotheses, the effect sizes for general self-esteem and OBSE did not significantly differ in analyses for both depression (ρ for general self-esteem = -.52; ρ for OBSE = -.51) and physical symptoms (ρ for general self-esteem = -.21; ρ for OBSE = -.28). Thus, Hypothesis 8 was not supported.

Exploratory analyses for demographic variables and OBSE

Table 5 reports analyses examining the relationships between demographic variables and OBSE. These analyses should be considered exploratory because we had no *a priori* hypotheses regarding them. As shown in the table, age ($\rho = .08$, $k = 20$, $N = 6,773$) and education ($\rho = .09$, $k = 14$, $N = 5,445$) yield weak, but statistically significant, relationships with OBSE, whereas gender and tenure are not significantly related to OBSE.

Table 5. Exploratory analyses examining relationships between employee demographics and OBSE

Variable	k	N	Mean r	SD_r	Mean ρ	SD_ρ	80% Credibility interval	95% Confidence interval
Age	20	6,773	.07	0.13	.08	0.14	-.11, .27	.01, .13
Gender	17	9,578	.03	0.05	.04	0.05	-.03, .11	.00, .06
Tenure	16	5,097	.06	0.13	.06	0.13	-.12, .24	-.01, .13
Education	14	5,445	.09	0.10	.09	0.10	-.05, .23	.03, .15

Note. k , number of samples; N , total sample size; Mean r , average weighted correlation coefficient; Mean ρ , average weighted correlation coefficient corrected for unreliability in the predictor and criterion. For gender, female = 1 and male = 2.

Discussion

Hypothesized predictors of OBSE

The current meta-analysis examined several hypothesized antecedents and consequences of OBSE. Consistent with the Pierce *et al.* (1989) model, general self-esteem and general self-efficacy were positively related to OBSE. These findings are not surprising, since general self-esteem has been viewed as a hierarchical construct of which OBSE is one of many low-order dimensions (Korman, 1970; Rosenberg *et al.*, 1995; Simpson & Boyle, 1975). Unexpectedly, however, emotional stability was only weakly related to OBSE.

Other analyses found that several environmental variables were positively related to OBSE, including job complexity, autonomy, perceived organizational support, and social support from supervisors and co-workers. As suggested in previous research, there are at least three processes by which the work environment may influence OBSE (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). First, the presence of favourable environmental conditions may implicitly signal to employees that they are respected, valued, and trusted by their organization and that the organization views them as capable and competent organizational members. An employee who is given much autonomy and has supportive supervisors, for example, could reasonably infer from the presence of these positive working conditions that her employer values and respects her and that she is seen as a competent worker. After all, why would an organization provide favourable working conditions to an employee who is not valued and respected?

It is also possible that some of these environmental variables were related to OBSE because they involve direct or explicit signals sent to employees regarding their competence and self-worth. The positive correlations found for supervisor and co-worker social support, for example, may be explained by the fact that some forms of

social support involve directly telling employees how much they are valued and respected by the organization (Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999).

Finally, some environmental variables may influence OBSE via effects on employee success (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Job stressors, such as role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, and job insecurity, for example, may have been negatively associated with OBSE due to their potential to interfere with successful job performance.

Hypothesized consequences of OBSE

Many of our hypotheses regarding the expected consequences of OBSE are based on self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970), which suggests that employees are motivated to maintain a consistent level of self-esteem. That is, individuals with high self-esteem respond to work in ways that maintain their favourable views of themselves. These employees, for example, may develop positive job attitudes and perform effectively at their work. Individuals with low self-esteem, on the other hand, are expected to respond to work in ways that maintain their unfavourable views of themselves. Thus, these employees are expected to hold negative job attitudes and to be ineffective performers. Consistent with this reasoning, we found that OBSE was positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, in-role job performance, and organizational citizenship behaviour.

A second possible explanation for the positive OBSE-performance relationship is provided by self-enhancement theory (Dipboye, 1977) and self-theory (Leonard, Beauvais, & Scholl, 1999), which hypothesize that workers are generally motivated to maximize their levels of self-esteem. According to these theories, workers with low self-esteem may intentionally withhold effort as a strategy to enhance their self-esteem. By withholding effort, these individuals place themselves into situations where they can attribute failure to lack of effort rather than lack of competence. Pierce and Gardner (2004) refer to this as 'damage control', because this process prevents one from internalizing failure and thus avoids harm to one's self-concept. This lack of effort in turn is expected to translate into poor performance. However, given that the current study did not specifically test these two explanations, further research is needed to examine whether self-consistency theory or self-enhancement theory/self-theory provides the better explanation for the current findings.

We also found that OBSE was negatively related to depression and physical symptoms. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that self-esteem can serve as a resource that allows one to fend off mental and physical illnesses (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). One possibility is that OBSE influences one's interpretations of workplace conditions (for similar processes linking negative affectivity to work stressors and strains, see Spector, Zapf, Chen, & Frese, 2000). Specifically, high-OBSE individuals may perceive a given condition at work as a challenge or opportunity, whereas low-OBSE individuals may perceive the same condition as a threat (Schuler, 1980). Another possibility is that one's level of OBSE influences how that individual actively shapes or self-selects into his or her work environment. High OBSE individuals, for example, may self-select into inherently rewarding work environments, whereas low OBSE individuals may self-select into inherently unrewarding work environments. The effects of the objective work environment on outcome variables (e.g., job attitudes, employee health) are likely to be mediated by perceptions of the work environment (Judge, Bono, & Locke, 2000). Additional research is needed to examine the processes by which OBSE influences employee health.

Frame-of-reference effects and the specificity of predictor and criterion variables

We found considerable evidence that OBSE yielded stronger relationships with measures of the work environment and with work-related criteria than did general self-esteem. These findings are consistent with research on frame-of-reference effects, which suggests that domain-specific personality measures yield better validity than do general personality measures (Bing *et al.*, 2004; Hunthausen *et al.*, 2003; Lievens *et al.*, 2008; Schmit *et al.*, 1995). Specifically, the relatively lower validities for general self-esteem may have occurred due to between-subject variability and within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation (see Lievens *et al.*, 2008). This possible variability and inconsistency in item interpretation occurs because general measures of self-esteem do not specify the domain in which participants are to consider when responding to items. Instead, participants are free to choose the domain that they use and they may use different domains for different items. On the other hand, measures of OBSE specifically ask participants about their self-esteem as organizational members. By specifying the domain that is to be considered when answering these items, OBSE measures avoid problems associated with between-subject variability and within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation.

Although we expected that general self-esteem would yield stronger relationships with general health outcomes than would OBSE, we found that the two forms of self-esteem actually yielded similar relationships with health. These findings are inconsistent with the bandwidth-fidelity principle (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996; Roberts & Donahue, 1994; Schneider *et al.*, 1996; Tett *et al.*, 2003) and the principle of compatibility (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005), both of which suggest that broadly measured predictors would yield stronger relationships with general criteria than would domain-specific predictors. Perhaps, the between-subject variability and within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation that is associated with general self-esteem measures may have overshadowed any potential advantages of assessing self-esteem as a general construct.

We should note that our analyses comparing OBSE and general self-esteem yielded a few unexpected results. General self-esteem, for example, was more strongly related to both role overload and OCBs than was OBSE. Furthermore, OBSE and general self-esteem yielded similar relationships with co-worker social support. However, the results of these analyses may simply be the product of second-order sampling error (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004), because each had relatively small *N*s.

OBSE as a mediator of the effects of general self-esteem

We found considerable evidence that OBSE mediates the relationships between general self-esteem and work-related criteria. These findings, which are consistent with past theorizing (e.g., Chen *et al.*, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989), are particularly true for job satisfaction, organizational commitment, affective commitment, and job performance.

Demographic differences in OBSE

Our exploratory analyses found that age, gender, tenure, and education were essentially unrelated to OBSE. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have found few demographic differences in other work-related variables, such as employee attitudes (e.g., Brush, Moch, & Pooyan, 1987).

In sum, the current study extends previous qualitative reviews (Levy *et al.*, 2003; Pierce & Gardner, 2004) in several different ways. First, we provide quantitative

estimates of the relationship between OBSE and its hypothesized predictors and consequences and we compare these relationships with those of general self-esteem. Second, our analyses included several samples that were not included in previous reviews of the OBSE literature. Finally, we examined several variables that were given little or no attention by Pierce and Gardner (2004), including employee health and demographics.

Future research

More research is needed to examine the potential predictors and consequences of OBSE. First, longitudinal research is needed to test potential reciprocal relationships involving OBSE (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). As suggested in the Introduction, bidirectional relationships may exist between OBSE and other variables, such as general self-esteem and job attitudes. Second, more research is needed to examine whether self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970) or self-enhancement theory/self-Theory (Dipboye, 1977; Leonard *et al.*, 1999) provide a better explanation for the current results. In particular, research should examine the possibility that self-consistency processes operate in some situations, while self-enhancement processes operate in others (Korman, 2001).

The current study suggests that high levels of OBSE are desirable for both individual workers and for their employers. Indeed, we found that OBSE was positively associated with job attitudes and performance, but was negatively related to poor health outcomes. Future research, however, should examine whether there may also be a 'dark side' to OBSE. The presence of false self-esteem or narcissism, for example, may have negative organizational implications (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Unfortunately, existing measures of OBSE do not address these potentially counterproductive forms of self-esteem.

Finally, future research should directly examine whether the theoretical process identified by frame-of-reference researchers explain why OBSE has stronger relationships with work-related outcomes than does general self-esteem. Specifically, we suggested that OBSE may yield higher validity than general self-esteem because OBSE measures are resistant to between-subject variability and within-subject inconsistency in item interpretation (see Lievens *et al.*, 2008). In future studies researchers could ask participants to report the cognitive processes that they use to respond to individual OBSE and general self-esteem items.

Practical implications

The current research has important practical implications. First, we found that several environmental factors were related to OBSE. This suggests that organizations may be able to effectively increase employees' OBSE by manipulating the work environment. Indeed, efforts to change a behaviour will be more effective if the intervention focuses on changing context-specific self-perceptions rather than general or core self-perceptions (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 2005). Therefore, if an organization is attempting to influence employees' attitudes toward themselves, the intervention should measure and attempt to change an employee's context-specific self-esteem (i.e., OBSE) rather than their general self-esteem. This possibility represents a potentially important difference between OBSE and other personality traits because personality is generally assumed to be stable and thus not responsive to organizational interventions.

We also found that general self-esteem and general self-efficacy were positively associated with OBSE. Although these findings suggest that individuals who consider themselves as generally being worthwhile and competent are likely to develop high levels of OBSE, the strength of these relationships is not so great as to suggest that OBSE is redundant with broadly measured self-esteem and self-efficacy. Furthermore, these findings suggest that measures of general self-esteem and general self-efficacy could be included in selection batteries as a way of increasing the likelihood that high-OBSE employees will be hired.

Finally, OBSE was found to be related to a number of work-related outcomes that are valued by both organizational leaders and individual employees, such as performance, job attitudes, and employee health. Thus, given its relationship with so many important outcomes, we believe that managers should give more attention to OBSE when planning organizational interventions.

Limitations

We should consider a few limitations of the current research. First, most of the primary studies included in our meta-analysis relied entirely on self-report data. Thus, our results may have been influenced by common-method variance. We should note, however, that some researchers have recently suggested that common-method variance may not be as serious a problem as generally assumed (Spector, 2006). Indeed, self-reports may be the most accurate means of assessing OBSE, given the self-reflective nature of self-esteem. Second, most of the primary studies used cross-sectional data, making it impossible to draw definitive conclusions regarding causal relationships. As suggested above, longitudinal research is especially needed, given that OBSE may have reciprocal relationships with many of the variables examined in the current research (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Indeed, many of the variables examined in the current study may be *both* predictors and consequences of self-esteem. Third, we had a small number of samples for many of the relationships. For this reason, caution should be used to interpret many of our analyses. Finally, we should note that most of the samples used data collected from organizations in the USA. Thus, the current findings may not be generalizable to employees in other nations.

Summary

The current research examined several hypothesized predictors and consequences of OBSE. In general, we found support for the relationships depicted in previously developed OBSE models (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Pierce *et al.*, 1989). We also found that OBSE generally yielded stronger relationships with work-related variables than does general self-esteem and that OBSE may mediate many of the effects of general self-esteem. Since OBSE has very important practical and theoretical implications, we believe that much future research is warranted in this area.

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