Fears, discrimination and perceived workplace promotion

Zachary Sheaffer and Shalom Levy

Department of Economics and Business Administration, Ariel University, Ariel, Israel, and

Edo Navot

United States Department of Labor, Washington, District of Columbia, USA

Abstract

Purpose – Past research about workplace promotion has focussed on factors that shape employees' perceptions for promotion. Yet, we still know little about how such undesirable factors as the fear of success (henceforth FoS) syndrome and perceived workplace discrimination affect perceived promotion and even less so how this relationship is mediated by self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. The purpose of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework integrating these factors.

Design/methodology/approach – A structural equation modelling procedure was employed to empirically test the model using data collected from employees in wide-ranging Israeli industries (n = 553).

Findings – The path model indicates that initially, FoS and perceived discrimination negatively affect perceived chances of promotion. When however, self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation mediate this relationship, subjects perceive their promotion chances positively.

Practical implications – Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation may be employed to attenuate the potentially adverse effects of FoS and discrimination effects.

Originality/value – FoS and perceived workplace discrimination are common phenomena, yet the authors show that they may be mitigated by heightened self-efficacy and amplified intrinsic motivation that help in sustaining perceived workplace promotion.

Keywords – Self-efficacy, Intrinsic motivation, Perceived discrimination, Chance for promotion, Fear of success

Paper type – Research paper

Introduction

Workplace promotion constitutes a primary facet of career paths. Recent transitions concerning employment in general and particularly career paths (Savickas et al., 2009) have inspired interest in intra-organisational mobility, promotions or advancement opportunities at workplaces and the way they are perceived by employees (Lukseyte et al., 2013). Promotion aspiration is related to the broader domain of career development (Dik et al., 2008). However, few empirical studies have hitherto examined perceptions of promotion decisions and antecedents and after-effects of those perceptions. Relevant studies have investigated employee beliefs vis-à-vis organisational criteria concerning promotion decisions, and their association with job satisfaction (Beehr and Taber, 1993) or employee behaviours (Webster and Beehr, 2013). Notwithstanding, calls for further research (cf. Tzafrir and Harel, 2009) of forerunners that potentially affect employees' perceptions regarding perceived or actual chances for promotion, have yet to be thoroughly addressed. We address this lacuna by focussing on how perceived discrimination and fear of success (henceforth FoS) shape perceived chances of promotion (henceforth, PCP). Our model sequentially examines how perceived discrimination affects FoS, how FoS influences self-efficacy, the effect of self-efficacy on intrinsic motivation, and motivation's effect on PCP. We further examine the role of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation in mediating the association between these initial antecedents and PCP with data predicated on an exploratory questionnaire distributed amongst respondents from wide-ranging Israeli industries. Though previous research has addressed various forms of the effect of both perceived discrimination and FoS on self-efficacy (cf. Heslin et al., 2012), no known works have thus far
associated both phenomena with PCP through the mediating effects of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.

Focussing on FoS and perceived discrimination as key explanatory variables, and the attempt to link them causally with PCP is motivated by several reasons. First, twenty-first century workplaces have become uncertain, hence, volatile (Kossek and Lambert, 2012). Job security fades away and careers turn protean in that they are typically driven by employees rather than by organisations, and are reinvented by individuals (De Vos and Soens, 2008). Despite awareness of changing corporate loci – highlighting such phenomena as affirmative action, diversity, career contracts or employability (Neck, 2015) – discrimination is still rife and innate FoS amongst employees, notably women, persists. This aura of transition, characterised by growing uncertainty, typically exacerbates rather than curbing fears. Additionally, given increasingly diverse workforces, discrimination continues to hamper upward mobility (Bihagen and Ohls, 2006). These circumstances call for a fresh examination of both perceived discrimination and FoS. Specifically, how they shape perceptions about promotion in newly evolving workplaces. Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation are important mediators because they constitute elemental behavioural constructs that, though extensively studied, have yet been shown to alleviate innate FoS and prevalent workplace discrimination’s adverse effect. Highly efficacious employees would necessarily be more intrinsically motivated (McAuley et al., 1991), thereby FoS and perceived workplace discrimination’s adverse impact on employees’ self-esteem and career aspirations thereof would be attenuated. We follow Foley et al.’s (2002, p. 491) recommendation to analyse employees’ perceptions of how promotion decisions are made, and Volpone and Avery’s (2013, p. 444) call to explore how self-efficacy buffers the negative effect perceived discrimination engenders. The hypothesised relationships underscore the importance of not solely PCP, but also concerning significant behavioural processes within which employees perceive their intra-organisational upward mobility. Studies in this domain could benefit from a stronger sense of embeddedness in the theoretical framework offered by the extant organisational behaviour literature.

Theory and hypotheses
Perceived chances for promotion
Workplace promotion is essential for employees. Hence, it significantly affects career paths, wages, spheres of responsibility, employability (Nauta et al., 2009), fairness (García-Izquierdo et al., 2012) and status (Janssen and Gao, 2015). Promotion is an imperative organisational procedure for management and employees alike (Delaney and Huselid, 1996). With respect to employees, they manage their career contingent upon the perceived likelihood of progressing upwards (Kaplan and Ferris, 2001). Beehr et al. (2004) argue that promotion is limited to a single vacancy, even if several contenders deserve the position, and decisions are often dichotomous (rejection/acceptance). If an applicant is accepted, co-employees are frequently reluctant to follow her/his instructions if they suspect that person’s nomination was biased. Relatedly, motivation and commitment is the ambition to seek ascendency within organisations (Gau et al., 2013) and, for those who desire higher positions, the belief that promotions are reasonably obtainable (Cassirer and Reskin, 2000). Therefore, promotional aspirations may stimulate employees to excel personally and surpass fellow employees’ performance, conduct or commitment to corporate goals (Zhou et al., 2012).

Perceived discrimination and FoS
Perceived discrimination occurs when individuals feel they have been treated unjustly owing to affiliation with specific social categories (Banerjee, 2008). Social psychologists (Czopp and Monteith, 2003) suggest that race and gender bias in society is invisible, deep,
Discrimination may be inspired by prejudice, stereotypes or racism (Aboud and Levy, 2000), but its definition does not presume any unique underlying cause (Pager and Shepherd, 2008). Workplace discrimination occurs through preventable and inequitable differences in fulfilling HRM tasks (Pynes, 2008) amongst staff of diverse backgrounds. Discrimination negatively affects discriminated-against groups or individuals, e.g., lower wages and/or higher unemployment (Lang and Lehmann, 2012). Pertinently, a distinction exists between differential treatment and disparate impact (McGinley, 2012). The former occurs when individuals are treated unequally due to race (Richardson and Norris, 2010). Disparate impact occurs when individuals are treated equally, subject to a given set of rules and procedures, but when the latter are constructed to favour members of one group over another (Reskin, 1998). FoS has been studied from the aspects of relational psychoanalysis (Schecter, 1979) to cognitive and social psychology (Conroy et al., 2001). FoS constitutes an innate mental stress that limits ambition and progress, notably amongst women (Horner, 1972). FoS surfaces when individuals doubt their abilities, and is accompanied by lack of self-confidence and disappointment (Nagel, 1990). FoS resembles fear of achievement intensified by fear of failure. This stems from the inability to accomplish one's duties and is accompanied by low self-esteem and ostracism (Griffore, 1977). Individuals who fear success would be dissatisfied with achieving their personal goals. Worse, FoS diminishes one's belief in one's capabilities to appropriately accomplish tasks and objectives owing to past failure, which often exacerbates this syndrome (Oxford and Shearin, 1994). Regardless of external evidence of their aptitude, individuals fearing success remain persuaded that they are frauds and do not merit the success they have achieved (De Vries, 2003). Proof of success is dismissed as timing, luck, or a consequence of misleading others into thinking that they are more competent and intelligent than they consider themselves to be, much like the dismissal of others' positive affirmations (Ferrari and Thompson, 2006). Intuitively, discrimination may be perceived as a trigger that sparks or intensifies an existing FoS syndrome. Horner (1972) pointedly argued that FoS is derived from stereotypes and biases that dissuade individuals from pursuing careers. Individuals perceiving discrimination or those biased against would necessarily be more apprehensive regarding their chances to succeed or concerning risk of failure. FoS amongst women stems from innate apprehension regarding the behaviour they should endorse that leads to success (Isaac et al., 2012). Implicit or explicit workplace discrimination further aggravates fears of either failure or success. Research reports (Britt-Spells et al., 2016) that perceived discrimination is positively associated with anxiety, depression, or insecurity along with lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem (Ellemers and Barreto, 2015). These symptoms are necessarily liable to engender or aggravate existing FoS (Gore et al., 2016). A case in point is black men with weaker racial identities, arising from discrimination, who demonstrate greater fear of succeeding (Campbell and Fleming, 2000).

We thus formally hypothesise that:

\[ H1. \] High levels of perceived discrimination will spark off or intensify existing FoS.

**FoS and GSE**

Self-efficacy is one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations (Ormrod, 2006). Individuals' self-efficacy is critical in how they approach goals, tasks and challenges (Luszczynska and Schwarzer, 2005). Determining the beliefs people hold regarding their power to affect situations and achieve across a broad range of situations (Chen et al, 2004) strongly inspires the power a person essentially has to encounter challenges capably and the choices one is most likely to make. Self-efficacy functions as a critical proximal behavioural element and it concerns explicit goal-oriented behaviours through intervening
affective, motivational and cognitive processes (Chen and Chen, 2016). People are mostly encouraged to confront challenging tasks and gain experience when the optimum level of self-efficacy is somewhat above their ability (Phillips and Gully, 1997). Highly self-efficacious individuals strive to accomplish tasks and persevere longer in those efforts. Employees’ ability to persevere despite discrimination is explained by their beliefs that they can attain broadly across various circumstances, typified as generalised self-efficacy (henceforth GSE). GSE is a form of self-belief that is primarily applicable to such stressful situations as perceived workplace discrimination (Randle, 2012). GSE differs from specific self-efficacy in that the latter applies to the ability to achieve in task-specific situations, whereas the former refers to the conviction in one’s aptitude to achieve across a broader range of circumstances (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Intuitively, higher self-efficacy would result in decreased FoS (Nelson et al., 2013). Nelson et al. (2013) argue that female students are less likely to esteem their skills and abilities, which adversely affects self-efficacy notably due to internalisation of self-devaluation. This resonates to lower self-esteem and self-worth concerning personal skills and abilities which subsequently undermine their career paths (Papastergiou, 2008). Relatedly, lower self-efficacy is significantly associated with fearing failure, else fearing success (Martin, 2002). In the context of achievement motivation, passive avoidance mode is interpreted as a type of FoS (Fleming and Horner, 1992). Individuals fearing success avoid negative incentives by inhibiting any achievement-related activity that enhances goal fulfilment (Sorrentino and Short, 1974). Individuals driven by FoS may have been chastised for doing well at an achievement task or for exhibiting any instrumental activity towards goal attainment. Thus, these individuals restrict future goal-directed behaviour in order to avoid facing similar negative repercussions (Pang, 2010). We thus hypothesise that:

\[ H2. \] Individuals characterised by high FoS will demonstrate lower levels of GSE.

Self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation
Work motivation is a set of vigorous forces that originate both within and beyond individuals’ being to initiate work-related behaviour and to determine its configuration, direction, intensity and duration (Pinder, 2008). Motivation is a person’s internal disposition to be involved with and approach positive incentives and avoid negative inducements. Motivation encompasses arousal, direction, and intensity of psychological processes (Seo et al., 2004). Arousal is what instigates action and is stimulated by individuals’ desire or need for something that is missing at a given point in time (Erez et al., 2012). Direction refers to the course employees take in achieving goals they set for themselves. Intensity is the vigour employees put into this goal-directed work performance (Mitchell and Daniels, 2003). Intrinsic motivation transpires when we act without any palpable external rewards. We merely enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn and realise our potentials (Coon and Mitterer, 2010). Intrinsic motivation relates to behaviour driven by internal rewards, e.g., the motivation to engage in a given behaviour arises from within since it is intrinsically rewarding (Dysvik and Kvaas, 2013). Deci (1980, p. 34) theorised intrinsic interest as “The need for competency and self-determination”. Bandura and Schunk (1981) identified self-efficacy as related positively to intrinsic interest. Pertinently, self-efficacy is comprised of coping abilities under stress or various internal motivational states (Bandura, 1984). Self-efficacy stimulates employees’ motivational processes in general (Multon et al., 1991), and constitutes an effective predictor that causally affects learning and motivation (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy beliefs have also shown convergent validity in affecting such key indicators of motivation as level of effort, choice of activities, and persistence (Zimmerman, 2011). Intrinsic motivation decreases when extrinsic rewards are offered contingent on performance, since extrinsic rewards lessen individuals’ sense of
personal causation and perceptions of competence (Pritchard et al., 1977). Self-efficacious individuals work more willingly, and persevere longer when they encounter difficulties than do their counterparts who doubt their own competences (Zimmerman, 1995). Aply, when students are taught to ascribe their enactive feedback to effort, they perceive higher motivation (Schunk, 1987).

Consequently, we hypothesise that:

\[ H3. \] Self-efficacy affects intrinsic motivation positively.

**Intrinsic motivation and PCP**

Motivation and PCP fall within the wider domain of career motivation theory (Bolton, 2011). Career motivation is the set of individual characteristics, related career decisions and behaviours that mirror individuals' career identity, career affecting factors, and resilience in the face of unfavourable career conditions (London, 1983). Two key characteristics underlie career motivation; individual willingness to wait for promotion and career rewards and, importantly, intrinsic control-belief about one's influence over promotional opportunities. Second, situational or time and experience requirements for promotion, striving for advancement and furthering advancement possibilities (Skinner, 1999). Relatedly, the contest-mobility norm (Wayne et al., 1999) presumes that employees' accomplishments are principally a function of hard work (Rosenbaum, 1984, p. 19). Motivational variables are associated with the contest-mobility norm. Additionally, intrinsic motivation augments affective commitment and plays a key role in transmuting high-involvement processes into valuable outcomes for employees (Boxall et al., 2015). Intrinsically motivated employees are more likely to enjoy their work and succeed in it (Horng et al., 2016), thus perceive themselves to be higher performers (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1994), and more likely to be selected for promotion (Henker et al., 2015). Since promotion is perceived to be meaningful to ambitious employees, specifically those eligible or those perceiving they are entitled to it, they would be significantly more motivated concerning promotion.

Thus:

\[ H4. \] Intrinsically motivated employees will have positive perceptions of promotion.

**Perceived discrimination and PCP**

Intuitively, individuals who perceive themselves discriminated against would be less likely to expect workplace promotion. For instance, stigmatising obese employees. Consistent evidence shows discrimination against the overweight in simulated employment decisions, including promotion (Roehling et al., 2007). Perceived discrimination was also associated with perceived institutional racism (Jeanquart-Barone and Sekaran, 1996) which, in turn, impedes vertical organisational advancement. The perceived Glass Ceiling Paradigm shows a perceived “transparent discrimination” to be negatively associated with perceptions of promotion (fairness) (Foley et al., 2002). Aply, workplace discrimination against women and blacks precludes their chance of ever looking for vertical organisational mobility (Foley et al., 2002). Ilgen and Youtz (1986) argued that black employees and women often internalise negative evaluations and stereotypes, such that they restrain themselves and turn down opportunities for promotion. Sexual orientation in workplaces has long been the focus of research about discrimination and its adverse repercussions (Kim et al., 2013). Ragins and Cornwell (2001) found that perceived discrimination is associated with adverse work attitudes and fewer promotions. Gay employees perceive and face restricted upward mobility and “lavender ceilings” in firms typified by heterosexism (Friskopp and Silverstein, 1996). Hence:

\[ H5. \] Employees perceiving discrimination will be less likely to perceive promotion.
**FoS and PCP**

Morrison and Von Glinow (1990) argued that women’s traits and behaviours, socialisation practices and attitudes do not make them deficient to assume leadership positions. That said, ample evidence shows that FoS, chiefly amongst women, often scuttles their aspirations for promotion rather than facilitates expectations for upward mobility. Fassinger (1996) alleged that FoS constitutes an internal self-barrier to vocational choice, and promotion in this vein is an innate occupational preference. Franzén (2005) found that female supervisors are uncomfortable in wielding power over others. Hence, it may not be success, *per se*, that women fear, but rather the idea that the behaviours that lead to success may be disapproved of by others (Austin, 2001). This type of fear succinctly encapsulates why FoS diminishes women’s expectations for promotion and it relates to the social norm of modesty which women may find difficult to defy (Wade, 2001). This is liable to engender self-sabotage at critical career junctures. Women recurrently demonstrate that their perception of entitlement elucidates “equality as greed”, as men take more for themselves than women do (Valian, 1998). Meaning, the way women perceive entitlement necessarily aggravates their FoS, given their belief that men are generally greedier and hence, may have higher promotional aspirations. Mallon and Cassell (1999) argue that women are less inclined to apply for jobs, unless they meet specification requirements, but those with FoS refrain from doing so. We hence hypothesise that:

\[ H6. \text{ FoS reduces PCP.} \]

Based on the above discussion, we formulate the study’s conceptual framework (Figure 1).

**Methodology**

*Procedure and sample*

Data were collected from employees of 12 firms in wide-rangiing Israeli industries. A key criterion for inclusion was being a company employee. Temporary employees were excluded. Questionnaires were distributed by students skilled in data collection who were instructed to obtain formal approval from firms’ management following which employees received a personal request to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. In total, 553 usable responses were analysed of 905 sent questionnaires (61 per cent). Most (68 per cent) respondents were from large firms, 17 per cent medium-sized and 15 per cent from small firms. A total of 79 per cent were the private sector employees. Gender distribution included 45 per cent male and 55 per cent female respondents. Most respondents were in the 21-35 age bracket (78 per cent), 17 per cent in the 36-50 age bracket and 5 per cent were in the 51+ bracket, with an average age of 31 (SD 8.8). A total of

![Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypotheses](image-url)
57 per cent were single, 38 per cent married, and 5 per cent divorced. Most respondents had
tertiary education (64 per cent), with an average or above-average income (59 per cent).
Mean tenure in the organisation was 5.1 years (SD 6.4).

Measurement
The survey instrument consisted of validated questionnaires pertaining to the study’s
theoretical constructs. PCP was measured based on Roznowski’s (1989) scale, which
measures employees’ attitude assessment and affective response to their work role. Intrinsic
motivation items were based on Grant’s (2008) scale regarding employees’ desire to expend
effort at work. We employed Chen et al.’s (2001) GSE scale that measures employees’
personal belief in having the capabilities to meet given situational work demands. Perceived
discrimination items were based on Schmitt et al. (2002) and Cornejo’s (2007) scales that
measure one’s ingroup disadvantages and outgroup privileges, modified to capture general
and varied groups’ discrimination. Participants were asked to express their experience and
personal feeling vis-à-vis discrimination. FoS items were based on Ray’s (1985) scale that
measures the level of success-fearing individuals with statements negatively describing
success’ costs and benefits. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement
with statements based on the aforementioned scales. A seven-point Likert scale was
used (“1” = strongly disagree; “7” = strongly agree) throughout. Demographic and
workplace-related information was also recorded.

Awareness concerning self-report limitations necessitated several remedies. First, scale
reordering (Sprangers and Schwartz, 1999) was employed to decrease consistency artefact
effects. Second, Harmans’s one-factor test was used (Richard et al., 2009) to ensure that no
common method variance was present. We also factor analysed all items in this study to
guarantee that no single factor emerged from this procedure (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986).
Indeed, the items loaded onto thematic factors.

Results
Validity and reliability
First, all variables’ items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis with varimax
rotation. The items with low internal validity were excluded. Then, the factor analysis was
run using the principal component analysis with varimax rotation, for the remaining items.
FA yielded five factors explaining 64.2 per cent of the cumulative model’s variance.
All items were satisfactorily loaded (< 0.5). GSE’s factor explains 24.4 per cent; eigenvalue
8.8. Perceived discrimination factor explains 13.9 per cent; eigenvalue 5. FoS’s factor
explains 11.5 per cent; eigenvalue 4.1. PCP’s factor explains 9.3 per cent; eigenvalue 3.3, and
intrinsic motivation factor explains 5.1 per cent; eigenvalue 1.9. Next, measurement items
were validated employing the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Four items with low
loadings were excluded from the FoS factor to ensure acceptable convergent validity.
The results confirm the constructs ($\chi^2$ value (417) = 894.89, $p > 0.05$ ($\chi^2$/df < 3);
comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.961; normed fit index (NFI) = 0.929; root mean square
error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.046) and their distinct character. CFA shows that scale
items loaded satisfactorily on the relevant latent variables and the items only loaded on the
scales were designed to measure. All loadings were statistically significant (< 0.5)
supporting the scales’ reliability and content validity (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent and
discriminant validity and internal consistency were examined using Cronbach’s $\alpha$, average
variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). All displayed acceptable validity
and reliability of the measurements. Table I illustrates the items’ standardised loading,
AVE, $\alpha$’s and CR for the model components. In AVE measurements, PCP had a construct
value of 0.54, GSE had a construct value of 0.63, perceived discrimination 0.63, intrinsic
motivation 0.56 and FoS 0.51, indicating an acceptable convergent validity for all constructs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables and items</th>
<th>Std. loading(^a)</th>
<th>AVE(^a)</th>
<th>Cronbach’s (\alpha)</th>
<th>CR(^b)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PCP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel that I have a good opportunity for promotion in my current work</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have fairly good chances for promotion</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>My employer is interested in the future promotion of its workers</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a good chance for promotion</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<tr>
<td>It will be easy for me to get ahead in my firm</td>
<td>0.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my firm, promotion is based on ability</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am in a dead-end job(^c)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic motivation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The job I do is important to me</td>
<td>0.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>I find my job exciting and challenging</td>
<td>0.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>My work enables me to learn new and interesting things</td>
<td>0.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am in this job for the money(^c)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>My job is uninteresting to me(^c)</td>
<td>0.70</td>
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<td><strong>Self-efficacy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>In general, I think I can obtain outcomes that are important to me</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe I can succeed at most any endeavour to which I set my mind</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges</td>
<td>0.87</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am confident that I can effectively perform many different tasks</td>
<td>0.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FoS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel uneasy being the centre of attention in a group</td>
<td>0.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I notice that things have been going particularly well for me, I get the feeling that it just cannot last</td>
<td>0.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>If someone calls attention to me when I am doing well, I feel awkward or embarrassed</td>
<td>0.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I am praised for something, I sometimes wonder if I will be able to do as well next time</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>I think that to want something very much is a sure-fire way to end up disappointed</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived discrimination</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>In general, in my organisation, more opportunities for promotion are available to people from certain races/gender</td>
<td>0.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, more privileges are available to people from certain races/gender</td>
<td>0.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, certain people have received some kinds of advantages, due to their race or gender</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, certain people have received preferential treatment because of their race or gender</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>At times, I have been the victim of race or gender discrimination in my organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>At times, people have been the victim of race or gender discrimination in my organisation</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, people from my race/gender have to work harder than others to get the same level of recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, people from certain races/gender have to work harder than others to get the same level of recognition</td>
<td>0.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, my suggestions or ideas are often ignored because of my race/gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>In my organisation, peoples’ suggestions or ideas are often ignored because of their race/gender</td>
<td>0.68</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** \(^a\)Average variance extracted; \(^b\)composite reliability; \(^c\)reverse coded. \(^*\)Standardized coefficients, \(p < 0.001\)

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**Table I.**
Confirmatory factor analysis: items' measurement properties
Furthermore, comparing correlation estimates’ square between any couple of these constructs with AVE values demonstrates higher values for AVE in all cases. This corroborates all constructs’ discriminant validity. The relationships between constructs and the maximum shared squared variance are presented in Table II. CR measurements were 0.89 for PCP, 0.93 for GSE, 0.92 for perceived discrimination, 0.86 for intrinsic motivation and 0.83 for FoS. Cronbach’s $\alpha$ were 0.89 for PCP, 0.94 for GSE, 0.94 for perceived discrimination, 0.85 for intrinsic motivation and 0.81 for FoS. These values display measurements’ good internal reliability.

**Model testing**

Based on the proposed theories and the hypothesised relationships, path analysis was conducted on the five-construct causal model, using the structural equation modelling, based on the maximum likelihood approach. The factors gleaned are treated as latent variables. We followed Bagozzi and Edwards’ (1998) procedure and compared a number of alternative models. The model with the best fit was retained as final. The model’s overall fit statistics (goodness of fit) show an acceptable level of fit ($\chi^2$ value (423) = 922.35, $p > 0.05$ ($\chi^2$/df < 3); CFI = 0.959; NFI = 0.927; RMSEA = 0.046), indicating that the path model is valid. The path model, regression standardised coefficients and significance levels are illustrated in Figure 2. The model demonstrates the latent variables’ direct and indirect effects on PCP. The model’s latent variables accounted for 30 per cent of PCP’s total variance ($R^2 = 0.30$). Parameter estimates and structural relationships are displayed in Table III.

In the final model, perceived discrimination was positively associated with FoS ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), supporting $H1$. FoS was negatively associated with self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.01$) supporting $H2$. GSE was positively and directly associated with intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), and intrinsic motivation was positively associated with PCP.

**Table II.** Correlational relationships between constructs (Cov), AVE and maximum shared squared variance (MSV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. PCP</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.55**</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>-0.16**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-efficacy</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>-0.17**</td>
<td>-0.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceived discrimination</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. FoS</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $n = 553$. Correlations are in the upper right-hand side while MSV’s are in the lower left-hand side. AVE’s are in italics (diagonal). **$p < 0.01$.

**Figure 2.** Structural model – path analysis results$^a$

Notes: $^a$Parameters are standardised parameter estimates and only significant paths are shown. $R^2$ is located in the upper right-hand corner. **$p < 0.01$. 

$^a$
(β = 0.55, p < 0.01). Therefore, H3 and H4 were corroborated. No significant relationships were found between perceived discrimination and PCP and between FoS and PCP. Hence, H5 and H6 were rejected.

Nevertheless, the relationships between perceived discrimination and PCP and between FoS and PCP were rather indirect (bootstrap with 95% CI: −0.010 to −0.028, p < 0.01; bootstrap with 95% CI: −0.043 to −0.110, p < 0.01, respectively), through the mediation of GSE. Additionally, GSE was indirectly associated with PCP (bootstrap with 95% CI: 0.310 to 0.141, p < 0.05, respectively) through the mediation of intrinsic motivation.

**Discussion**

Our findings show that self-efficacious and intrinsically motivated employees are significantly more likely to perceive their chances of promotion positively despite the fact that initially both their perceived discrimination and FoS diminish PCP. We corroborated the hypothesis postulating that employees fearing success (and failure) will be less self-efficacious (Caraway et al., 2003). FoS thwarts self-actualisation, and the fulfilment of one’s potential (Tresemner, 2012). This is because individuals afflicted with this syndrome fear their potential greatness, and thus refrain from fulfilling their aptitudes or attempt to evade their destiny. In contemporary highly competitive and achievement-oriented environments, subjects with high FoS uphold a self-defeating strategy (Bramante, 2015), since they are less inclined to strive for success. Hence, they are less likely to benefit from the attainment of success, as shown by their lower intrinsic motivation. Perceived workplace discrimination, our second negative forerunner, has been commonly shown to engender an instantaneous sense of conflict, duress and injustice (Bell, 2012). A strong sense of perceived or actual discrimination induces employees’ discouragement. Consequently, the evolving aura of helplessness further disheartens the realisation of their potential. Manifestly, the two negative inducements for self-efficacy (FoS and perceived discrimination) are positively correlated. Indeed, when perceived discrimination and FoS as precursors directly predict PCP, the relationships prove negative (though statistically insignificant), commensurate with previous literature (cf. Foley et al., 2002), corroborating these inverse associations. This negative interrelatedness provides an appropriate preamble to the research model at large. This is because we aimed to show that in the end – regardless of the negative circumstances wherein perceived discrimination and FoS impede self-esteem – if employees affected by both phenomena were empowered towards enhancing their self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, in the long run they perceive their chances of promotion positively. As hypothesised, and commensurated with previous studies, we found that highly efficacious employees are more intrinsically motivated and, in turn, perceive their upward mobility favourably. Indeed, GSE aims at a comprehensive and stable sense of personal competence, which expectedly augments intrinsic motivation (Mathies and Viet Ngo, 2014). Applied to somewhat different settings that refer to the wider domain of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Accepted</th>
<th>Standardized effect</th>
<th>Regression weights (direct)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived discrimination → FoS</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>0.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of success → Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>-0.343</td>
<td>-0.287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy → Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation → Perceived chances of promotion</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0.549</td>
<td>0.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived discrimination → PCP</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-0.017</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoS → PCP</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td>&lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table III.** Parameter estimates and structural relationships: direct and indirect.
careers which necessarily includes promotion, it was found that higher levels of career decision making self-efficacy are associated with both a more differentiated vocational self-concept and to greater engagement with career exploration activities (Gushue et al., 2006).

The choice of FoS and perceived discrimination as our model’s “launching” theoretical constructs is because both are ostensibly negatively related to intra-firm mobility, lateral and chiefly vertical. Regardless of the organisational and personal circumstances surrounding and affecting employees’ perceived workplace discrimination and innate FoS, both appear to be mutually reinforcing, though our path analysis shows the former to affect the latter. Discriminated-against employees or those merely perceiving workplace discrimination would necessarily fear success or failure. Naturally, prejudice, unfairness or biased attitudes intensify existing or perceived apprehensions (Ganapathy and Mayilsamy, 2013), which in turn, reduce promotion expectations. As argued in the introduction, scholarly and practitioner interest in the wider domain of intra-organisational mobility is on the upswing (Chudzikowski, 2012). Increasingly diverse workforces and, predominantly, the ascendance of female employees (Peterson, 2012) necessitate further research concerning workplace discrimination and FoS as factors affecting vocational environments. Since both are inherent human phenomena, they are innately intertwined with, and have an inexorable effect on employees’ aspirations for either promotion or lateral organisational mobility. Our findings have significant implications for hands-on managers because enhancing employees’ self-efficacy and focussing explicitly on various forms of intrinsic motivation may allay their FoS, much like the alleviation of their perceived workplace discrimination. This applies specifically to female employees whose FoS and workplace discrimination have been found to exceed that of their male counterparts (Lühe, 2014).

We employed well-developed and empirically validated theoretical constructs that form the building blocks of our research model. That said, the research model forms unique and hitherto untested effects that on the whole contribute to the ever-important research on career success at large and notably, promotion expectations. Thus, our findings integrate with and contribute to a critical domain of career paths and markedly vocational success. This relates to various aspects including proactive employee personality (Wang et al., 2017), in current boundaryless career world that poses challenges in the contemporary volatile job market. This also applies to the wider domain of human capital where internal promotion and external recruitment have been shown to be effective means to achieve top managerial positions (Frederiksen, and Kato, 2017).

Limitations
Our study has several limitations. First, data were cross-sectional, meaning we cannot unambiguously ascertain the direction of the associations found. Research employing a longitudinal design is warranted to further unravel causal relationships between FoS, perceived discrimination, the mediating constructs (GSE and motivation), and the resultant PCP. Temporal data set would be advantageously designed if each of the constructs was measured sequentially as presented in our study. Whilst not unequivocally causal, sequential measurements appear useful in terms of controlling for time-lags; hence, they are likely to reflect the dynamics of the process at hand (Taris and Kompier, 2014). Additionally, incorporating objective measures would overcome drawbacks intrinsic to research employing self-reported data. Even though self-perceptions appear appropriate in evaluating both antecedents and outcome variables in similar models, this involves a risk of common method bias. Whilst our sample was relatively large, thus adequately representative, it was based solely on Israeli Jewish respondents. A challenging scholarly endeavour would include samples from different national cultures and ethnic groups. Despite accelerated globalisation, we trust that the inclusion of distinct national cultures and ethnic groups may potentially enrich this line of research and supplement theoretical
depth, specifically given contemporary diverse workforces. Comparisons amongst cultures and ethnic groups, vis-à-vis each of the theoretical constructs, and a model that incorporates respondents from different national cultures and ethnic groups, would be instrumental in this avowedly important vocational aspect.

Conclusions and implications
We endorse the view that in contemporary workplaces, aspects on top of promotion, constitute key to career success (Sutherland, 2017). That said, promotion remains a pivotal facet to evaluate career success (Zivnuska et al., 2017). Workplace promotion characteristically signifies an important career aspect. Intra-organisational workplace, lateral and horizontal mobility and advancement are regarded key to improving employees’ professional and managerial status, overall satisfaction and contribution thereof. Promotion, actual or perceived, is affected by a host of factors, not least of which are explicit or implicit workplace discrimination and the FoS phenomenon. Discrimination and FoS are liable to undermine employees’ overall personal and organisational functioning. Workplace promotion or career ambitions are innately embedded and should be viewed in light of any perceived impediment. Our model shows how enhanced self-efficacy and heightened intrinsic motivation may be instrumental in augmenting perceptions of workplace promotion. Generally, ambitious employees constitute an advantage and channelling this avowedly critical aspiration judiciously, such that it integrates with and enhances overall organisational functioning (Bryan and Joyce, 2007). Thoughtful attention to boosting self-efficacy and the resultant intrinsic motivation may not only result in higher job satisfaction and improved performance, but it may predict how employees perceive their chances for promotion, thereby enabling judicious decisions concerning promotion. That said, heightening SE is not invariable positive. It is also liable to engender excessive expectations which employees find hard to accomplish. Thus, these disproportionate aspirations may, in turn evoke adverse behavioural and attitudinal effects on exceedingly self-efficacious employees (Fine et al., 2016). This phenomenon occurs according to the Social Cognitive Theory that posits discrepancy resulting from adoption of goal challenges jointly with reactive discrepancy reduction in fulfilling them (Bandura and Locke, 2003).

With respect to the wider domain of career success, future studies should extend the scope of workplace promotion by extending the scope into such other factors affecting vocational success as protean careers (Herrmann et al., 2015). This is because current career paths necessarily imply being multiskilled, gaining qualifications and enriching relationships, both intra-organisational and otherwise, such that employees adapt quickly and thrive in ever-changing and often hyper competitive workplaces.

References


Bell, M.P. (2012), *Diversity in Organizations*, South-Western/Cengage Learning, Mason, OH.


Corresponding author
Shalom Levy can be contacted at: shalom@ariel.ac.il

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