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Overqualification at Work: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature

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overqualification, overqualified workers, career success, person–job fit

Abstract

Both perceived and objective measures of employee overqualification can impact job attitudes, various workplace behaviors, and work relationships. Utilizing motivation and capability-based theoretical approaches, this review summarizes research regarding the antecedents (demographic influences, personality traits, relational influences, job characteristics) and outcomes (individual health and well-being, turnover intentions and turnover, job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, interpersonal relationships, innovative behaviors, counterproductive work behaviors, and career success) of overqualification. In addition, we review work done to date regarding the moderators and mediators of these relationships. Finally, we offer future directions for research.

INTRODUCTION

Job attitudes: a general term for the various feelings that individuals have about their jobs (e.g., job satisfaction, job engagement)

Overqualification describes an employment situation where an employee's qualifications, such as education and experience, exceed job requirements and are not utilized on the job (Erdogan et al. 2011). Described as a form of underemployment (Feldman 1996), overqualification is generally viewed as an undesirable employment situation, may serve as a barrier to employment (Wald 2005), and presents implications for employee job attitudes, workplace behaviors, and interpersonal relationships (Liu & Wang 2012). Understanding how overqualification affects employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace is both theoretically and practically important. Interestingly, even though sociologists, labor economists, and education scholars have considered implications of overqualification in the past several decades (Erdogan et al. 2017), overqualification is a relatively new topic of interest in organizational behavior and human resource (HR) management, with most research taking place after Maynard et al.'s (2006) scale development paper.

The overarching purpose of this article is to present an integrated summary of the literature, which has experienced significant growth in the past decade, with an eye toward stimulating future research. The overall pattern of the relationships we discuss is presented in **Figure 1**. As of this

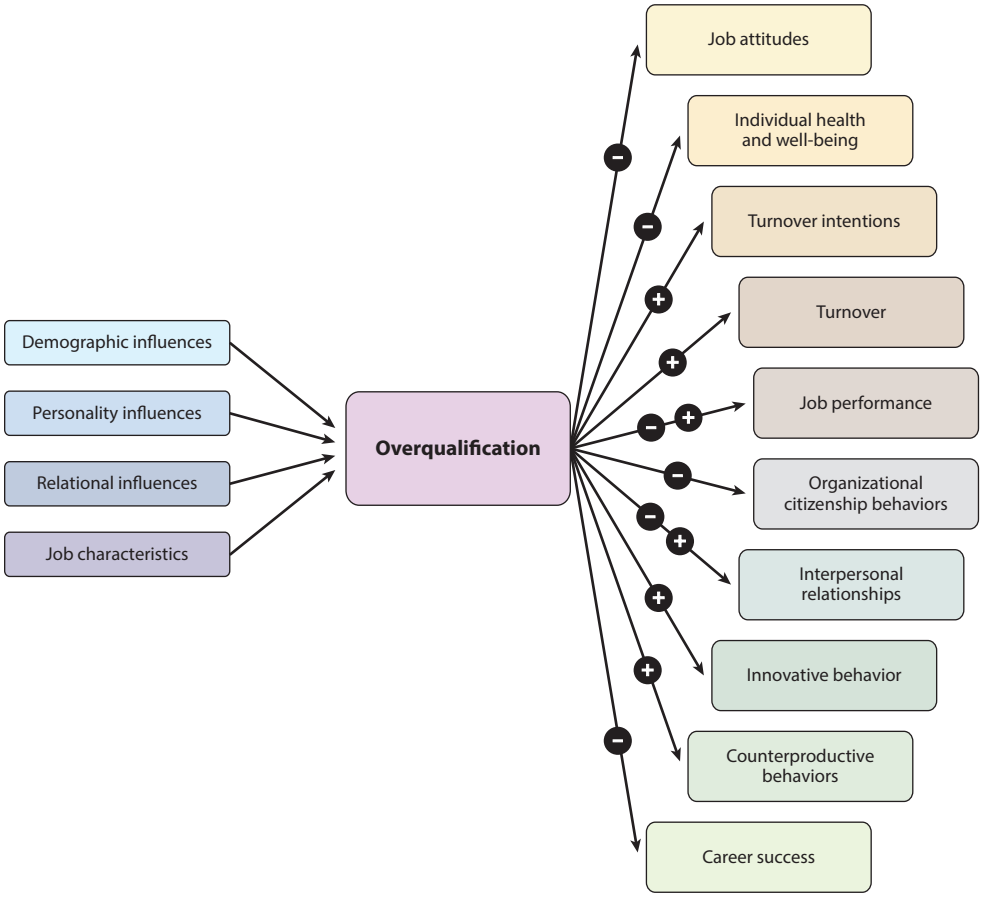

Figure 1

Antecedents and outcomes of overqualification.

writing, 77% of all work in this area that appeared in the PsycINFO database was published after 2010. Given the pace at which the field grows, it is important to identify the areas of emerging consensus and questions that remain unanswered and to discuss valuable future research directions. Although labor economics and education literatures have yielded valuable findings, we exclude them in our review, as these literatures have been reviewed elsewhere (Erdogan et al. 2017). Our focus in this article is to specifically review the treatment of overqualification in the management literature.

Perceived overqualification: a form of underemployment in which employees believe that their skills, education, and experience are neither required by nor utilized on the job

Objective overqualification: a measure of overqualification calculated using non-perceptual measures of job requirements and employee qualifications

MEASUREMENT APPROACHES TO OVERQUALIFICATION

Before we summarize and evaluate the management literature on overqualification, it is important to understand how researchers operationalize overqualification. This is an important point, because how overqualification has been operationalized affects the conclusions we can draw from this literature. Studies typically utilize measures of perceived overqualification, with self-reports being the norm. The most commonly used measurement instruments (Johnson & Johnson 1996, Maynard et al. 2006) capture the degree to which employees feel that their qualifications exceed job demands. It is rare to see studies utilizing a measurement perspective other than that of the focal individual (for an exception, see Debus et al. 2020). The available evidence suggests that self- and other-reports of overqualification show some convergence. For example, Triana et al. (2017) reported a correlation of 0.54 between self- and coworker reports. Among studies utilizing perceptual measures, a small group of studies explicitly examined the degree to which the individual's cognitive abilities exceed the cognitive abilities demanded by their job (Fine & Edwards 2017, Fine & Nevo 2008). Results revealed a correlation of 0.69 between perceived cognitive overqualification and perceived overqualification (Fine & Nevo 2008). In short, it is important to keep in mind that most of what has been studied in this literature relates to the implications of seeing oneself as overqualified as opposed to being regarded as overqualified, or being actually overqualified for the job.

A second approach to measuring overqualification relies on objective measures where researchers utilize separate assessments of employee qualifications and the level of qualifications required by the job, with the mismatch between the two capturing overqualification. These studies usually focus on overeducation, as it is relatively straightforward to capture the individual's education level and the formal educational requirements of the job. Ideally, the measurement of individual qualifications and the qualifications required by the job would be assessed from different perspectives, with necessary qualifications reported by job analysts or knowledgeable insiders. One notable study (Arvan et al. 2019) used multiple measures of objective overqualification, including overqualification with respect to 35 skills included in O*NET. The results of this study have shown that different objective overqualification metrics had correlations ranging between 0.32 and 0.54 with perceived overqualification. Summarizing studies measuring overeducation and perceived overqualification, Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis revealed a correlation of 0.40 between the two.

What can we conclude about how overqualification is measured in the literature? First, these studies show that measures of overqualification, regardless of measurement perspective, show some convergence. At the same time, the correlations are not so high as to indicate that they are interchangeable, so it is unlikely that different measures can substitute for each other. Therefore, researchers should take care to align their measures to the questions they want to answer. For example, when the study goal is to examine how overqualification affects employees' success in a job search setting, objective overqualification or recruiter perceptions of overqualification will be more appropriate. In contrast, perceived overqualification is more suitable for investigations of how employees cope with being overqualified.

Relative deprivation: individuals' experiences of deprivation that stem from feeling entitled to a better job

Person–job fit: the extent to which an individual's characteristics are in alignment with the demands of a job

Second, the nature of the relationship between different types of measures remains unclear, and it is likely that they reflect different theoretical processes. For example, when are employees who feel overqualified perceived as overqualified? What are the factors that would make someone's overqualification level more or less visible to others? Do different types of measures relate to outcomes in a different manner? It is plausible that believing oneself to be overqualified for the job will have different implications for interpersonal relationships and role engagement relative to being perceived as overqualified for one's job. So far, the nature of the relationship between different types of measures and any differential predictions associated with them has received little research attention.

Finally, our review suggests a potential overreliance on self-rated overqualification at the expense of other-ratings and more objective metrics. As such, most of what we know about overqualification relates to how employees feel and behave when they feel overqualified, as opposed to when they are perceived to be overqualified, or when they are actually overqualified. These points are important to remember when interpreting the extant literature and designing future studies.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO OVERQUALIFICATION

When studying implications of overqualification for individuals and organizations, the most commonly referenced theoretical framework remains relative deprivation theory (Crosby 1984). According to this perspective, overqualification engenders a sense of being deprived of the job one deserves, and therefore is associated with a host of negative outcomes for individuals and organizations (Erdogan et al. 2011). When individuals feel overeducated for a job, the sense of deprivation seems to be particularly powerful, likely because the formal education system creates expectations about the type of job a person should have, including expected social status, pay and benefits, and the accompanying interpersonal relationships (Vaisey 2006). Overqualified individuals may, therefore, feel that the job is beneath them. Many studies reference relative deprivation to explain why perceived overqualification would be associated with less positive organizational attitudes (e.g., Ye et al. 2017), and there is empirical evidence that perceived relative deprivation mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and individual well-being (Erdogan et al. 2018). This theory, which is tightly linked to anger and resentment (Smith & Pettigrew 2015), may also help explain why anger at one's work situation is a mediator of the effects of perceived overqualification (Liu et al. 2015).

The effects of overqualification on job attitudes and well-being may also be explained by person–job fit theory (e.g., Liu et al. 2015). According to this perspective, overqualification is a type of misfit with one's job, which should result in negative outcomes. In the person–environment fit literature, person–job fit is typically conceptualized as consisting of demands-abilities (alignment between job demands and a person's abilities) and needs-supplies [the degree to which individual needs are supplied by the job (Cable & DeRue 2002)] fit. Research to date does not show a mediating role for demands-abilities fit, but suggests support for needs-supplies fit as a mediator of the effects of perceived overqualification (Luksyte et al. 2011). In other words, overqualified employees see a mismatch between what their jobs provide and what they need from their jobs. The predictions of person–job fit theory and relative deprivation tend to be consistent and explain the negative effects of overqualification on job attitudes and behaviors. In fact, there seems to be little distinction between predictions that may be based on relative deprivation theory and person–job fit theory. At the same time, relative deprivation theory may be more useful in understanding the emotional reactions of employees to feelings of overqualification, as this explanation explicitly evokes anger and resentment.

An alternative contrasting perspective explains the positive effects of overqualification by operationalizing overqualification as the availability of, or self-assessments relating to, surplus skills and qualifications. This perspective focuses on the high levels of capabilities the employee can deploy to cope with the demands of the job and excel at their work. Consistent with this explanation, Zhang et al. (2016) showed that perceived overqualification was positively related to role breadth self-efficacy, which in turn predicted other- and organization-focused proactive behaviors. Similarly, Deng et al. (2018) regarded perceived overqualification as a positive self-perception of one's capabilities and predicted that such positive perceptions regarding one's qualifications could result in higher levels of social acceptance by one's peers, to the degree to which these employees also manage to avoid conveying an appearance of superiority.

To summarize, overqualification studies tend to take one of two possible approaches to the study of overqualification, namely motivation and capability-based approaches (Wu et al. 2017). According to the motivational view, perceived overqualification is a possible demotivator because it captures the feeling that one's job is deficient in some way. According to the capability perspective, it captures employee possession of superior skills and qualifications and the employee's positive self-assessments. Depending on which perspective is adopted, it is possible to make different predictions with respect to how overqualification would affect employee attitudes, behaviors, well-being, and organizational outcomes. It is also likely that different situations activate different mechanisms with respect to outcomes. For example, contextual factors that alleviate relative deprivation may motivate employees to perform at a high level, given their superior capabilities. Finally, different measurement approaches may evoke different theoretical mechanisms. Perceived overqualification's negative effects on attitudes are aligned with a relative deprivation explanation, whereas positive effects on performance could be due to positive self-assessments and self-efficacy. Other-rated perceived overqualification or objective overqualification could have additional positive outcomes due to surplus skills. In other words, it is important to ensure that the measurement approach is aligned with the theoretical perspective chosen to study particular relationships.

ANTECEDENTS OF OVERQUALIFICATION

What are the factors and conditions contributing to the prevalence of overqualification? The answer is likely to be different depending on how overqualification is measured. When the focus is on objective overqualification, macroeconomic influences may provide an adequate explanation. For example, Vaisey (2006) reports that between 1972 and 2002, overeducation among full-time workers between the ages of 25 and 65 increased from 30% to 55%. In this time period, the number of years of education individuals obtained increased by 1.75 years, whereas the educational requirements of the jobs increased by 0.33 years. The phenomenon of overeducation may, therefore, be explained by the high levels of education labor force participants possess relative to jobs that are capable of absorbing them. In fact, some organizations may require credentials that will not actually be used on the job, contributing to the overqualification level of a workforce.

In contrast, the influence of macroeconomic forces provides an inadequate explanation for interpersonal differences in perceptions of overqualification. In this section, we review studies that investigated predictors of perceived overqualification. Research on overqualification antecedents remains scarce compared to the studies of overqualification outcomes. As a result, investigating antecedents of overqualification remains an important area for future research.

Demographic Influence

Although a meta-analytic investigation of the literature suggests that age and gender are not correlated with perceived overqualification (Harari et al. 2017), both education and tenure

showed significant correlations with perceived overqualification. As expected, higher education is correlated with higher perceived overqualification, but this is a modest relationship ($\rho = 0.08$). In other words, some employees with higher levels of formal education tend to perceive themselves as overqualified, but feelings of overqualification are not restricted to those employees who have higher levels of formal schooling.

Harari et al. (2017) found that job tenure had a negative relationship with perceived overqualification ($\rho = -.14$), with newer employees feeling more overqualified. This is an interesting finding, and may point to feelings of overqualification being transient among new degree holders. It is plausible that new college graduates with little to no experience may begin their first jobs with overconfidence about their own skills and high expectations about how much they will be able to utilize their skills and qualifications. Alternatively, organizational insiders may avoid giving newcomers a lot of opportunities to perform tasks where they can fully utilize their skills, given that these employees are still in an early adjustment period. Finally, it is possible that new employees are in a better position to see that they are overqualified and take action to leave in order to find a better fitting position.

Personality Traits

Significant correlations with both narcissism and negative affectivity indicate that some personality traits are associated with heightened feelings of overqualification (Harari et al. 2017). For example, Maynard et al. (2015) showed that the entitlement dimension of narcissism was a predictor of perceived overqualification. Studies examining personality traits in relation to perceived overqualification are still rare but suggest that personality traits that are likely to increase overall job dissatisfaction may influence individuals' self-assessments of perceived overqualification. When individuals see themselves as superior to others, or are likely to notice the negative aspects of their jobs more readily, they are more prone to feeling overqualified.

Relational Influences

Alfes et al. (2016) predicted that perceptions of overqualification may arise from employees' relationships with others within their work group. Specifically, a study utilizing two samples in the Netherlands found support for the prediction that leader–member exchange (LMX) quality and team cohesiveness were negatively related to perceived overqualification. However, the study utilized a cross-sectional design, indicating that reverse causality is also a possibility. Still, theoretically it is plausible that high-quality relations with one's manager and teams may provide greater opportunities to use one's skills, reducing feelings of overqualification.

Job Characteristics

Finally, the type of job the employee holds may predict the degree to which the individual feels overqualified. Lobene et al. (2015) showed that repetitiveness of one's job was the strongest predictor of perceived overqualification among the job characteristics examined in the study, with a requirement to wear a uniform (perhaps creating the sense that employees are interchangeable and performing routine work) and the level of pay also explaining additional variance in perceptions of overqualification. In their study of expatriate employees, Bolino & Feldman (2000) showed that job level, availability of onsite mentoring, and strategic importance of one's unit were among the negative predictors of overqualification. These studies suggest that the meaningfulness of the job as well as the status, power, and influence afforded the job within the organization seem to be

important influences over the degree to which individuals feel overqualified, with simpler, more routine, and less demanding jobs increasing the risk of overqualification among employees.

OUTCOMES OF OVERQUALIFICATION

What are the implications of perceived overqualification for employees and organizations? To date, overqualification has been related to a wide range of job attitudes and behaviors. These studies yielded relatively consistent findings for job attitudes and less consistent findings with respect to behaviors. In other words, although feelings of overqualification are typically associated with less positive job attitudes, its implications for performance, innovativeness, and turnover may be more situational and vary across studies.

Job Attitudes

Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis showed that job satisfaction and organizational commitment are among the most frequently studied outcomes of perceived overqualification, with perceived overqualification showing somewhat stronger negative correlations with job satisfaction relative to organizational commitment. Interestingly, there also seem to be cultural influences over the strength of the relationship between overqualification and job attitudes, but the reason for this is unclear. Specifically, perceived overqualification was only related to organizational commitment in cultures low in power distance (Harari et al. 2017), suggesting that perceived overqualification was more problematic in egalitarian cultures.

A key limitation of studies examining overqualification in relation to job attitudes is the possibility of common source and common method bias to inflate these relationships. Specifically, most of these studies utilize self-reports of overqualification and use cross-sectional designs. Therefore, studies such as Arvan et al.'s (2019) demonstrating that objective overqualification is related to job satisfaction indirectly through perceived overqualification are much needed in order to increase our confidence in these findings. Similarly, looking at the relationship between perceived overqualification and outcomes over time and employing research designs that minimize common method bias (such as using other-rated perceived overqualification) would be valuable additions to the literature.

Individual Health and Well-Being

Overqualification has been associated with a variety of well-being indicators. The meta-analytic correlations between perceived overqualification, well-being, strain, and positive affect are significant, whereas physical well-being has a nonsignificant meta-analytic correlation (Harari et al. 2017). Research shows that overqualification carries risks to individual well-being that are comparable to the risks carried by unemployment. For example, Roh et al. (2014) sampled individuals who were either still unemployed or reemployed 18 months following a layoff. Their results showed that life satisfaction of reemployed individuals who felt overqualified was not significantly different from life satisfaction of unemployed individuals. Overqualification has also been identified as an important predictor of psychological health and mental well-being in vulnerable populations such as immigrants (Chen et al. 2010, Wassermann & Hoppe 2019).

Studies also indicate that the strength of the relationship between overqualification and well-being indicators varies across individuals. For example, Erdogan et al. (2018) showed in a study of new college graduates that perceived overqualification had an indirect negative relationship with subjective well-being, mediated by perceived relative deprivation. Furthermore, the relationship

was stronger for individuals high in career centrality, suggesting that individuals who cared more about their career success and saw their careers as important in their lives were at risk of poorer well-being when they felt overqualified. Those who placed less importance on their careers were still negatively affected, but the effects were weaker. Supporting the role of personality in reactions to perceived overqualification, Wassermann & Hoppe (2019) showed that the strength of the relationship between perceived overqualification and life satisfaction was weaker for individuals high in optimism, again suggesting that the negative effects were not universal.

Turnover intentions: an individual's desire to leave their current organization

Interestingly, a supportive organization or supportive manager may not necessarily alleviate the negative effects of overqualification perceptions with respect to well-being. Yu et al.'s (2019) study of employees working in 12 firms in China demonstrated that perceived overqualification was related to higher levels of work alienation, which indirectly predicted emotional exhaustion. By demonstrating that the relationship was actually stronger when LMX quality was high, the study revealed that high-LMX members felt more alienated from their jobs when they perceived themselves as overqualified. It seems that employees who have a high-quality exchange with their managers may expect to be in jobs that will more fully utilize their skills. As a result, feelings of overqualification may be associated with feelings of deprivation due to these frustrated expectations.

Turnover Intentions and Turnover

Overqualification has long been thought of as a precursor to an individual's decision to leave an organization. There is clear evidence that perceived overqualification is associated with a desire to leave (Harari et al. 2017), with a meta-analytic correlation of 0.37 between perceived overqualification and turnover intentions. There is also evidence that perceived overqualification predicts behaviors that would ultimately lead to departures from an organization, such as increased job search behavior, particularly among individuals with stronger competence and growth needs (Maynard & Parfyonova 2013).

Employees who perceive themselves to be overqualified may believe that they deserve to hold a better job that utilizes their skills and may regard overqualification as a way to exit this situation. Supporting this argument, Maynard & Parfyonova (2013) reported that alumni of a university were more likely to report having changed jobs six months after reporting their feelings of overqualification and reported lower levels of perceived overqualification in their new jobs. In other words, leaving the organization may be an effective strategy to reduce one's perceptions of overqualification. At the same time, the desire to leave the organization may also be a direct result of the perception that they are not valued within the organization and the perception of an uncertain future in the organization. As a case in point, Peiró et al. (2012) showed that perceived overqualification was related to higher perceived job insecurity.

The relationship between perceived overqualification, turnover intentions, and turnover is conditional in nature, suggesting that the desire to leave that accompanies feelings of overqualification may be alleviated in the presence of other organizational conditions. Erdogan & Bauer (2009) identified psychological empowerment as one such moderator with respect to turnover intentions and turnover. Similarly, Debus et al. (2020) showed that autonomy was a moderator, and the effects of autonomy were transmitted via higher levels of job crafting. In other words, empowered employees create job conditions that will allow them to utilize and expand their skills in different ways, reducing the demotivating effects of perceived overqualification.

Maltarich et al. (2011) observed that perceived overqualification may be more indicative of a desire for movement, whereas objective overqualification may capture actual ease of movement.

There are not enough studies that would allow us to compare the predictive validity of perceived and objective measures of overqualification with respect to actual turnover. However, their point that the type of overqualification metric in question must be considered carefully when examining these relationships is noteworthy. Measures of perceived overqualification may have a weaker relation to actual turnover, given that not everyone who is interested in leaving will actually be able to leave.

Job performance: the extent to which employees execute the responsibilities of their job

Job Performance

Unlike job attitudes, job performance has the potential to be both negatively and positively affected by overqualification. This is because a motivation-based explanation would suggest that the experience of relative deprivation may demotivate employees and reduce performance, whereas a capability-based explanation would suggest that overqualification would enable employees to perform at a high level. As a result, the relationship may be less straightforward than some of the other outcomes examined in this literature. The meta-analytic correlation Harari et al. (2017) report is nonsignificant. However, an examination of individual studies paints a more complicated picture. Erdogan & Bauer (2009) reported a positive but nonsignificant correlation in a sample of sales associates, but the relationship was significant and positive in their multivariate analyses. In this study, the performance metric used was objective sales data, and the presence of direct rewards to higher levels of sales could explain the positive relationship. In other words, in a context where there are other motivators (in this case, pay), perceived overqualification had positive effects on performance. Lobene & Meade (2013) also reported a positive relationship in a sample of teachers, but the relationship was only positive when teachers reported low levels of calling for their profession. For teachers who had high calling, performance was uniformly high. Other studies reporting a positive relation include those of Fine (2007) as well as Fine & Nevo (2008), who utilized a perceived cognitive overqualification measure, among others. Along with other studies that showed positive but moderated relationships (Deng et al. 2018, Hu et al. 2015), it is possible to conclude that the nature of the relationship between overqualification and performance has the potential to be positive under the right conditions.

An interesting possibility that has not yet received attention in management literature was examined in the marketing literature. Purohit (2018) explored the relationship between perceived overqualification and supervisor ratings of employees' sales performance. In this study, overqualification was positively related to sales performance only when the organization followed outcome-based control systems and followed an analyzer or prospector strategy. These organization-level influences are important to consider carefully. When the organization is using outcome-based control strategies, employees typically are given autonomy in their work methods and receive rewards for goal accomplishment. Such contexts, including the one Erdogan & Bauer (2009) also study, may mean that overqualified employees will have the motivation as well as freedom to use their surplus skills on behalf of the organization. Similarly, prospector strategy involves locating and exploiting new products and market opportunities, whereas the analyzer strategy involves maintaining traditional areas of competence while the organization is also looking to identify new opportunities (Miles et al. 1978). Unlike a company using a defender strategy, where stability and predictability are emphasized, companies embracing prospector and analyzer strategies value innovativeness, risk taking, and quick action. These two business strategies are more likely to create an environment where employees will have higher levels of autonomy and be encouraged to use their judgment, as opposed to being expected to fit a mold and demonstrate a narrow range of acceptable behaviors. In other words, organizations may differ in the extent to which they can benefit from overqualified employees.

Exploring the relation between overqualification and performance, Van Dijk et al. (2019) developed a theoretical model examining the conditions under which overqualification is most likely to be positively related to job performance. In doing so, they contended that overqualification may provide a human capital advantage, but this advantage should only emerge when the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the individual are related to the individual's job, in complex jobs, and when performance metrics are objective. Similarly, they proposed that overqualified employees may emerge as highly influential and high-status individuals in their groups and networks, affording them opportunities to perform. However, these advantages should only emerge when overqualified employees are perceived as warm. The nuanced nature of this model suggests that the nonsignificant meta-analytic correlation may not reflect the complex reality of when and under what conditions overqualification would result in performance advantages or deficiencies.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Unlike job performance, which has both a motivation and a capability-based explanation, citizenship behaviors are more likely to be affected by employees' desire to be helpful to others as opposed to their capabilities. As a result, the emerging picture involving citizenship behaviors has been negative. Part of the reason for this could be that overqualified employees may experience interpersonal challenges at work, reducing their desire to be helpful. For example, Erdogan et al. (2020a) showed that perceived overqualification was negatively related to both helping others and voice, with the effects on voice buffered by high levels of person–organization fit. In this study, helping and voice were measured via manager reports. In Kim et al.'s (2019) study of white-collar workers, the negative effects on self-reported citizenship behaviors were mediated by job boredom and were buffered by high levels of career calling. Therefore, the nature of the relationship appears to be negative, and the relationship depends on employee motivation to give back to the organization.

Depending on the target of citizenship behaviors and the strategic value of citizenship targets for employees, the results may differ. As a case in point, Collins & Long (2015) demonstrated that employees who felt overqualified engaged in higher levels of volunteerism activities outside their organizations. The authors of the study interpreted this finding as motivated by a desire to signal their work ethic and competencies to prospective employers. Similarly, to the degree to which employees feel that citizenship behaviors will yield future advancements, the nature of the relation between overqualification and citizenship may be positive. Finally individual identification with the group may determine whether individuals with surplus skills choose to share them with their group. Van der Vegt & Bunderson (2005) showed that within-group diversity in expertise level had negative effects on team learning and performance when team identification was high. In a similar fashion, identifying with the team may be the impetus for citizenship behaviors for overqualified workers.

Interpersonal Relationships

Similar to the relationship between overqualification and performance, researchers proposed two alternative and competing ways in which overqualification may affect one's coworkers. According to one perspective, overqualified employees may act in ways that will jeopardize their relationships with coworkers because they feel that they deserve a better job and experience a sense of deprivation. Because they believe that their current jobs are beneath them, they may also feel and express a sense of superiority to their coworkers (Deng et al. 2018). In contrast, it is plausible that an overqualified employee emerges as someone who can mentor others and serve as an informal

leader to them (Deng et al. 2018, Russell et al. 2016). These competing arguments once again suggest that overqualified employees will lack motivation but possess capabilities to be helpful to their colleagues, and different situations may trigger different motives.

Studies empirically examining the relationship between overqualification and interpersonal relationships present a complicated picture. Deng et al. (2018) conducted a series of two studies to show that employees' political skills play a key role in determining how feelings of overqualification affect interpersonal dynamics. For employees who understand the impact of their actions on others (i.e., those with high interpersonal influence), the relationship between perceived overqualification and perceived social acceptance was positive, whereas the relationship was negative for those with low interpersonal influence. Furthermore, when coworker ratings of employee acceptance were used, the relationship was nonsignificant when interpersonal influence was high and negative when it was low. This study suggests that employees who feel overqualified may act in ways that will damage relationships, depending on their level of political skills.

Again supporting a negative relationship between overqualification and interpersonal relationships, Erdogan et al. (2020a) examined the nature of the relationship between perceived overqualification and social network centrality. Their study demonstrated that perceived overqualification was indirectly and negatively related to advice network centrality of the focal employee only for employees who perceived low levels of fit with the organization. They also showed that when employees felt low person–organization fit, higher levels of overqualification resulted in lower levels of citizenship behaviors targeting coworkers, which resulted in lower levels of advice network centrality for these employees. In other words, this study provided no support for the argument that employees who feel overqualified would emerge as sources of advice for others. Instead, there was a tendency for them to have lower levels of centrality, which disappeared when employees experienced fit with the organization. The finding that overqualification has negative effects on network centrality is consistent with the notion that individuals are more likely to choose as a source of advice someone low in competence but high in likability as opposed to someone high in competence but low in likability (Casciaro & Lobo 2005).

Even though studies examining the implications of overqualification for interpersonal relationships are still rare, the emerging evidence suggests that the relationship seems to be more supportive of negative, as opposed to positive, effects. While overqualified employees may feel capable of helping others, the sense of deprivation may result in a sense of alienation from coworkers, resulting in these employees distancing themselves from their coworkers. It also seems possible to alleviate this tendency when overqualified employees have political skills or experience a sense of motivation due to a sense of belongingness to the organization, even though their fit with their job is lacking.

Innovative Behaviors

Although the meta-analytic correlation between perceived overqualification and innovative behaviors is nonsignificant (Harari et al. 2017), there are several individual studies that indicate a pattern of positive relationships, suggesting that under the right conditions, overqualification may motivate individuals to demonstrate higher levels of proactivity and innovativeness. For example, Zhang et al. (2016) showed that perceived overqualification was associated with coworker- and organization-directed proactive behaviors, because perceived overqualification was associated with the belief that they could perform a larger set of tasks that went beyond their job description (role-breadth self-efficacy). Furthermore, this relationship was stronger when individuals were higher in performance goal orientation and lower in learning goal orientation. In Luksyte & Spitzmueller's (2016) study, when overqualified employees received support from the organization

or when they had special, individualized arrangements with the organization (developmental i-deals), they demonstrated higher levels of creativity.

Organizational identification: the extent to which an employee feels a sense of belongingness with an organization and sees the organization's successes and failures as their own

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs): employee behaviors that are damaging to an organization (e.g., absenteeism, theft)

In the only curvilinear investigation of overqualification, Lin et al. (2017) showed that perceived overqualification had a curvilinear relationship with task crafting, resulting in higher levels of creativity. In other words, the highest levels of task crafting emerged when employees perceived moderate levels of overqualification. Furthermore, organizational identification was a moderator of this relationship.

Studies linking overqualification to innovative or creative behaviors conclude that the nature of the relationship depends on employee personality and the quality of the relationship between the employee and the organization. Consequently, overqualified employees have the potential to emerge as highly creative and innovative employees, depending on whether they see a reason to utilize their skills and qualifications on behalf of the organization.

Counterproductive Work Behaviors

The only behavioral outcome that shows a consistent relationship with perceived overqualification is counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), with a meta-analytic correlation of 0.16 between the two (Harari et al. 2017). Luksyte et al. (2011) showed that perceived overqualification was positively related to CWBs through higher levels of cynicism, lower levels of needs-supplies fit, and weaker perception of relational psychological contract. Similarly, Liu et al. (2015) showed that perceived overqualification was positively related to CWBs via lower levels of organization-based self-esteem and higher levels of anger at the situation. Kim et al. (2019) also found a positive relation, this time mediated by job boredom. These results suggest that strong negative emotions may explain the link between overqualification and CWBs. There is also evidence that perceived overqualification is positively related to behaviors that may be characterized as counterproductive to organizational effectiveness, such as cyberloafing (Cheng et al. 2020), particularly among individuals high in need for achievement. Similar results were observed using different indicators of perceived overqualification, such as perceived cognitive overqualification (Zheng & Wang 2017). Interestingly, Fine & Edwards (2017) showed that perceived cognitive overqualification only predicted more minor types of CWBs and those targeting the organization, but did not predict CWBs that were illegal or more serious in nature, or those targeting other individuals. In other words, the type of CWB in question may affect the strength of this relationship.

Career Success

Do overqualified employees have good career prospects? Does having skills and qualifications that exceed their current job requirements give them an advantage for upward mobility? This is an important area that has not received substantial research attention (Erdogan & Bauer 2011). In the economics literature, Sicherman & Galor (1990) developed the career mobility hypothesis and proposed that overeducation would be a short-lived phenomenon and overeducated employees should quickly move to a position that could leverage their qualifications. This prediction did not find support in the small number of studies on this topic. Specifically, Wald (2005) showed in a sample of more than 1,400 Canadian workers that overeducation was negatively related to perceived career prospects and positively related to having looked for a job in the past 12 months. Instead, most investigations of the relationship between overqualification and career success utilized intrinsic career success indicators. These studies also suggest that the nature of the relationship between perceived overqualification and perceived career success is negative (Erdogan et al. 2018, Gkorezis et al. 2019) or nonsignificant (Wassermann et al. 2017). One intriguing finding

is that the negative relationship between overqualification and career satisfaction was contingent on managers' job insecurity, with no effects when employees reported to managers who felt relatively secure in their jobs (Erdogan et al. 2020b). More research investigating how objective and subjective indicators of perceived overqualification affect the degree to which the employee receives support for career advancement is important. Furthermore, employee mindset may matter a great deal here—with employees who have a high level of learning orientation reacting more proactively and constructively to feelings of overqualification.

OVERQUALIFICATION AND RECRUITER REACTIONS

The studies we reviewed so far were based on samples of employees who were already employed at an organization and examined the implications of perceived or objective overqualification on employee attitudes, behaviors, and well-being. However, these studies do not speak to the question of whether organizations would benefit from hiring overqualified workers and how job applicants can cope with and avoid being labeled overqualified for a job. We actually know little about recruiter or hiring manager reactions to job applicants who are overqualified for their jobs.

There is some evidence that having an overqualified résumé does not necessarily mean that recruiters will view the applicant as overqualified. For example, Triana (2011) conducted a laboratory experiment using fictitious candidate résumés and job descriptions and found that when the applicant was a male and was described as a secondary wage earner of a household, they were more likely to be thought of as overqualified as opposed to female job applicants who were described as secondary wage earners. Such results suggest that hiring managers may bring their biases about applicant characteristics that are irrelevant to the qualifications of the person when they make judgments about whether someone is overqualified for the job.

Second, overqualification may not always be a problem for recruiters, and the extent of the problem may vary by the situation. In two separate qualitative studies (Bills 1992, Kulkarni et al. 2015), hiring managers expressed willingness to hire overeducated job applicants. Supporting these findings, Thompson et al. (2015) conducted a series of laboratory experiments and showed that students playing the role of recruiters did not differ in their reactions to overqualified and just-qualified candidates. Furthermore, the reason the applicants gave for applying for this position made a difference. For example, presenting an internal and controllable reason, such as a desire to achieve work–life balance, elicited more positive reactions for overqualified applicants compared to presenting an external and uncontrollable reason, such as being the victim of a layoff.

Verhaest et al. (2018) also failed to show a bias against overqualified candidates in their field experiment where they sent fictitious résumés for real job postings in Belgium. Instead, they found that overeducated fictitious job applicants (those who held a master's degree for a job that required a bachelor's degree) were 11% more likely to get a positive reaction. However, there was a preference for overeducated applicants only when the job did not require job experience. These findings are in line with Feldman & Maynard's (2011) proposition that recruiters will tolerate a certain level of overqualification in job applicants if they believe that overqualified candidates will bring other desired skills and personal attributes. Finally, in Verhaest et al.'s (2018) study, some industries were more enthusiastic about overqualified applicants. Specifically, jobs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), finance, and insurance industries showed greater preference for overeducated job applicants. This last finding is consistent with Martinez et al.'s (2014) theoretical model, which predicted that overqualification would be more acceptable in knowledge-intensive jobs, as there may be more opportunities for overqualification to provide a human capital advantage.

Galperin et al. (2019) conducted the only empirical study that supported the idea that overqualification could be a liability for applicants. The authors predicted that hiring managers would show

a preference for adequately qualified candidates as opposed to very high-ability candidates, with the assumption that very high-ability candidates would be less committed to the organization. This study is different from the prior studies in that study participants playing the role of hiring managers were not presented with specific job descriptions and were presented with only the job title. Therefore, it is unclear whether those playing the role of hiring managers actually perceived any of the candidates as overqualified for the position, but they reacted to both résumés in this within-subjects design. The study also showed that when job applicants presented signals of commitment, such as having declined other job offers, this tendency reversed. In other words, even though overqualification may serve as an employment barrier, it is possible to alleviate and reverse this concern when recruiters receive reassuring information regarding the likelihood of their commitment.

As can be seen, research on reactions of others to overqualified job applicants is still in its infancy, and the emerging picture does not indicate a uniform bias against overqualified applicants. As with other findings relating to how employees react to their own overqualification, recruiter reactions to applicant reactions also seem to be situational. Qualitative studies on this topic have identified numerous other reasons HR and hiring managers may show reluctance to hire overqualified applicants, including the possibility of turnover, boredom, asking for too much money, being unclear on motivations of these applicants, potential difficulties of training them, lack of ambition, and potential negative effects on coworkers (Bills 1992, Kulkarni et al. 2015). Although Galperin et al.'s (2019) study is informative, there may be reasons other than perceived low commitment that could explain negative reactions hiring managers may have toward overqualified candidates.

MODERATORS OF OVERQUALIFICATION

When reviewing the literature up to this point, we discussed the factors that emerged as moderators of overqualification. As **Table 1** illustrates, researchers have uncovered a large and diverse set of moderators that affect the nature of the relationship between overqualification and outcomes. It is possible to categorize these moderators as personal, relational, job-related, and organizational moderators. Personal moderators include factors that would make individuals more [e.g., career centrality (Erdogan et al. 2018)] or less [e.g., resilience (Wang et al. 2019)] sensitive to the negative effects of overqualification. Relational moderators capture the nature of the relationship between the employee, group, or the organization, and they may energize the employee to use their skills for the good of the organization [e.g., organizational identification (Lin et al. 2017)], may affect the ability of the employee to access organizational resources, such as manager job insecurity (Erdogan et al. 2020b), may counterbalance the negative effects of overqualification by providing support [LMX quality, team cohesion (Alfes et al. 2016)], or may sensitize the employee to the negative effects of overqualification even more [LMX quality (Yu et al. 2019)]. Job-related moderators include factors that serve as buffers and an alternate way in which employees may find their situation satisfying, such as autonomy (Debus et al. 2020). Finally, organizational moderators include contextual differences that motivate employees to leverage their overqualification [e.g., organizational strategy (Purohit 2018)] or perceptions of the organization that satisfy employees' sense of esteem [e.g., organizational prestige (Gkorezis et al. 2019)].

One of the limitations of overqualification research is the several moderators examined in the literature in a piecemeal fashion. There are few studies that investigated the same moderator, which introduces questions regarding replicability of the findings. One exception is autonomy. Several studies to date have shown that psychological empowerment (Erdogan & Bauer 2009) and its key component autonomy (Debus et al. 2020, Wu et al. 2017) weakened the negative effects of perceived overqualification and its outcomes, including job satisfaction, adaptive behaviors,

Table 1 Representative list of moderators of perceived overqualification

	Moderators	Source
Personal moderators	Career calling	Lobene & Meade 2013
	Career centrality	Erdogan et al. 2018
	Competence and growth needs	Maynard & Parfyonova 2013
	Host national identity	Wassermann et al. 2017
	Interpersonal influence	Deng et al. 2018
	Justice sensitivity	Liu et al. 2015
	Learning goal orientation, performance goal orientation	Zhang et al. 2016
	Need for achievement	Cheng et al. 2020
	Optimism	Wassermann & Hoppe 2019
	Proactive personality	Simon et al. 2019
	Psychological capital	Sesen & Ertan 2019
	Resilience	Wang et al. 2019
Relational moderators	Average peer overqualification	Hu et al. 2015
	Mentoring others, perceived organizational support	Luksyte & Spitzmueller 2016
	Leader-member exchange	Yu et al. 2019
	Leader-member exchange	Alfes et al. 2016
	Organizational identification	Lin et al. 2017
	Person–organization fit	Erdogan et al. 2020a
	Manager job insecurity	Erdogan et al. 2020b
Job-related moderators	Autonomy, job crafting	Debus et al. 2020
	Autonomy, national culture	Wu et al. 2015
	Autonomy	Wu et al. 2017
	Idiosyncratic deals	Luksyte & Spitzmueller 2016
	Psychological empowerment	Erdogan & Bauer 2009
Organizational moderators	Organizational learning	Zheng & Wang 2017
	Organizational prestige	Gkorezis et al. 2019
	Organizational strategy, outcome-based control system	Purohit 2018

turnover intentions, and turnover. The replicability of the remainder of the motivators remains in question, and it is unclear which moderators are more powerful than others.

Studies of moderators typically relied on focal individuals' reports of moderators, with multilevel investigations absent (see Erdogan et al. 2020b for an exception). This is an important omission, as currently we do not know how factors such as group norms, task interdependence, or HR practices moderate the nature of the relationship between overqualification and outcomes.

MEDIATORS OF OVERQUALIFICATION

Similar to our coverage of moderators of overqualification, we included a discussion of mediators throughout our review. However, providing an overview of studies that examined mediators of overqualification is also helpful to take stock of the literature's treatment of mediators. As **Table 2** illustrates, several studies examined mediators of overqualification. With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Hu et al. 2015, Liu et al. 2015, Luksyte et al. 2011), most studies examined mediators in a

Table 2 Representative list of mediators of perceived overqualification

Mediator	Outcome	Source
Anger, organization-based self-esteem	Counterproductive work behaviors	Liu et al. 2015
Cynicism, needs-supplies fit, relational psychological contract	Counterproductive work behaviors	Luksyte et al. 2011
Harmonious passion	Cyberloafing	Cheng et al. 2020
Job boredom	Organizational citizenship behaviors, counterproductive work behaviors	Kim et al. 2019
Perceived career performance, life satisfaction	Close social tie life satisfaction	Gkorezis et al. 2019
Positive affect (initial status and change), autonomy (initial status and change)	Turnover intentions, intrinsic motivation, social acceptance, perceived overqualification	Simon et al. 2019
Relative deprivation	Career satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction	Erdogan et al. 2018
Role-based self-esteem	Proactive behaviors	Zhang et al. 2016
Social acceptance	In-role performance, altruism, proactivity	Deng et al. 2018
Task crafting	Creativity, citizenship	Lin et al. 2017
Task significance, person–group fit	In-role performance, citizenship	Hu et al. 2015
Work alienation	Emotional exhaustion	Yu et al. 2019

piecemeal fashion, focusing on a single mediator. As a result, studies of mediators would benefit from careful integration and joint inclusion in empirical studies.

Furthermore, the examination of mediators would benefit from taking a theory-based approach and utilizing mediators derived from competing theories. For example, relative deprivation and person–job fit are two commonly used theoretical frameworks to the study of overqualification. It would be beneficial to contrast the degree to which mediators derived from these theoretical perspectives explain the effects of overqualification on outcomes. It is also important to control for some of the established mediators when new mediators are being introduced.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

As we summarized so far, the overqualification literature has generated a large volume of scholarship investigating the implications for individuals of being and feeling overqualified. Our review suggests that there are many areas where we know more than we did a decade ago. For example, numerous studies examined the outcomes of overqualification in the form of job attitudes, well-being, and workplace behaviors. At the same time, our review reveals multiple areas where we need further research.

What Do Perceived Overqualification Measures Capture?

As discussed earlier, overqualification is measured using either objective or subjective measures. Even though it is possible for an individual to feel overqualified because of too much education, too much experience, or a combination of both, objective measures typically rely on measures of overeducation, whereas subjective measures of overqualification (e.g., Maynard et al. 2006) combine different forms of overqualification. Therefore, it is unclear whether different forms of overqualification (such as overeducation versus overexperience) have differential effects on outcomes of interest.

Furthermore, it has largely been assumed that overqualification perceptions are shaped by employees' cognitive comparisons of their own qualifications with those of what the job requires. An important question is whether employees actually compare their own qualifications to those qualifications required by the job or to qualifications they observe in others. Even though measures of overqualification prompt and direct employees to consider job requirements, it is also likely that these perceptions are at least partially shaped by the qualifications of the employees surrounding the person. For example, a person who previously held a high-level managerial position may initially feel overqualified when they consider taking on a role where they will not be supervising anyone. However, when they realize that their qualifications are similar to the qualifications of others they will work with, they may start feeling that they are not overqualified for their positions. In other words, in a context where job requirements are broad and ill defined, employees may take their cues from the qualifications of those around them when forming judgments of overqualification. As a result, investigating the role of social comparison processes (Festinger 1954) for how employee perceptions of overqualification are developed and experienced is a potentially important area.

How Does Culture Affect the Experience of Overqualification?

On the basis of Gelfand et al.'s (2017) terminology, it is possible to view overqualification literature as largely culture blind, but not culture bound. Specifically, the literature is not necessarily culture bound because the study of overqualification has not been restricted to WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) samples. Instead, the literature is highly diverse with respect to countries and contexts in which studies took place. For example, studies utilized data collected in Belgium (Verhaest et al. 2018), China (Zhang et al. 2016), Germany (Wassermann & Hoppe 2019), Greece (Gkorezis et al. 2019), South Korea (Kim et al. 2019), Spain (Erdogan et al. 2018), Turkey (Erdogan et al. 2020a), and the United States (Luksyte & Spitzmueller 2016), among others. However, the literature remains mostly culture blind, because even though different geographies have been represented, research questions typically did not embrace an emic approach (utilizing variables derived from a cultural context) and did not examine the role of culture itself. In a rare example of an investigation of culture, Wu et al. (2015) showed that the moderating role of autonomy with respect to overqualifications' relation to job attitudes was stronger in individualistic, as opposed to collectivistic, cultures. In an example of a study adopting an emic approach, Wassermann et al. (2017) examined immigrants' levels of host national identity as a moderator of the relation between perceived overqualification and job satisfaction. Specifically, Spanish and Italian immigrants in Germany were more negatively affected by perceived overqualification if they placed a high value on their German identity.

Harari et al. (2017) incorporated the role of culture (operationalized by power distance of the country the research is from) as a moderator in their meta-analysis. Their findings showed that most of the relationships they examined were not affected by power distance. Still, a few notable differences emerged. Specifically, education was significantly correlated with overqualification only in high power distance cultures, whereas age and organizational tenure had negative correlations with overqualification only in low power distance cultures. Regarding outcomes, overqualification had a significant negative relation with organizational commitment only in low power distance cultures. The rationale behind these findings remains unclear and is in need of theory-based examinations. Is power distance the actual driver of these differences? In other words, is it particularly problematic to be overqualified in an egalitarian culture? Or is power distance a proxy for labor market opportunities, with overqualification being particularly problematic for individuals in more favorable labor markets and finding a "match" in the job market being valued more highly?

There is a need for further research that explicitly focuses on cultural nuances when formulating hypotheses. As Gelfand et al. (2017) observed about industrial and organizational psychology in general, the study of overqualification is based on Western principles such as pursuit of individual happiness and freedom of choice. Formulating theories by taking culture into account may yield different predictions. For example, even though overqualification may be related to turnover, this may be motivated by a desire to find a better fitting job utilizing one's skills in individualistic contexts and a motivation to find the right social environment in collectivistic contexts.

Recently, Gelfand et al. (2017) introduced the concept of tightness-looseness as a framework to study cultural differences. This conceptualization of culture may have important implications for the study of overqualification. Tight cultures are defined as those with strict norms and punishments for rule deviation, whereas loose cultures are those with weaker norms and a more permissive approach. These differences have historical, ecological, and sociopolitical reasons and affect behavioral patterns of individuals in those cultures including innovativeness, health, and well-being (Gelfand 2019).

When integrated into overqualification literature, tightness and looseness may introduce a different perspective as to how employees may react to overqualification. In tight cultures, strong norms about appropriate and inappropriate behavior abound. In Turkey, a country classified as among the tighter cultures, it is common for job postings to list the maximum years of experience and the minimum and maximum levels of education the job holders are expected to have. For example, a search through job postings on February 6, 2020, for Turkey on Glassdoor (**http://glassdoor.com**) yielded examples such as PepsiCo looking for an assistant brand manager who is a "fresh graduate of maximum 2 years of work experience in marketing," the German chemical company Henkel advertising "minimum 1, maximum 2 years of experience in marketing," and PwC advertising a posting for "PwC Turkey New Graduate," with "maximum 1 year of professional experience." Note that these postings were in English and originated in Turkish subsidiaries of global companies. In the same site, Turkish language ads for local firms included "colleague who has completed military service [implying a male candidate] of maximum 30 years of age" for a paint shop employee, and "candidate who has minimum 1 year of experience, and maximum 32 years of age" for a job driving for an HR department (**http://glassdoor.com**), again limiting the range of acceptable levels of experiences upon organizational entry.

These practices indicate that there are societal expectations regarding the appropriate level of experience and education a job holder is expected to have, and deviations are likely to be minimized through the use of HR practices that will limit the amount of overqualification prevalent on a job. For example, it will be highly difficult for someone who has a decade of experience to obtain a job that does not require any experience. Similarly, when a college graduate ends up in a job that is traditionally not viewed as commensurate with his or her education level and quality, the social consequences for their feelings of status and deprivation are likely to be higher. As a result, tightness of a culture may affect both the prevalence of overqualification and the strength of the negative reactions to overqualification.

How Do Perceptions of Overqualification Develop?

With few exceptions, overqualification studies adopted a between-person approach to studying overqualification, with the assumption that overqualification is static and explains interpersonal differences in job attitudes and behaviors. Adopting a within-person approach would allow researchers to examine how employee perceptions of overqualification may change and be shaped by the work context. For example, Simon et al. (2019) examined overqualification among newcomers using a within-person design with weekly surveys. One of their interesting findings is that day 1

overqualification and perceived overqualification at 90 days were correlated at only 0.60. In other words, overqualification seems to be a perception that is malleable and responsive to the work environment. This study also concluded that early perceived overqualification affected the level of subsequent perceived overqualification through a broaden-and-build process (Frederickson 2001), with early overqualification predicting lower levels of positive affect early on, which resulted in reduced autonomy, affecting later negative attitudes and perceived overqualification.

Understanding how perceived overqualification responds to changes in the work environment is important to increase our understanding of antecedents of overqualification. To date, research examining antecedents of overqualification lag behind studies treating overqualification as a predictor of other outcomes. Furthermore, in addition to understanding factors that would explain how individuals differ in their level of overqualification such as education level or personality traits, it is important to understand how individual perceptions of overqualification change over time. For example, the addition of underqualified coworkers or a manager low in competence to the group may result in increases in feelings of overqualification. The assignment of meaningless and repetitive tasks may also contribute to increases in perceptions of overqualification.

Using a longitudinal approach may also bring more clarity to some of the established findings in the literature. For example, Arvan et al. (2019) conducted a study linking perceived overqualification and job satisfaction using a panel design. Their results suggested that job satisfaction was a predictor of perceived overqualification, but perceived overqualification was not a predictor of job satisfaction. This is an interesting and intriguing finding. Studies of overqualification typically theorize and assume that perceived overqualification is a precursor to job attitudes, including job satisfaction. However, as Arvan et al. (2019) recognized, it is also plausible that perceived overqualification reflects how employees make sense of a dissatisfying employment situation by distancing themselves. Similarly, the nature of some of the previously discovered relationships may become clearer by utilizing longitudinal research examining overqualified employees over time. As a case in point, Sesen & Ertan (2019) showed that perceived overqualification was negatively related to job crafting. At the same time, it is plausible that higher levels of job crafting result in lower levels of perceived overqualification. To summarize, research exploring how individuals develop perceptions of overqualification remains an important area for future research.

Who Does Overqualification Affect?

To date, the overqualification literature has tended to assume that the target of any positive or negative effects of overqualification is individuals themselves. However, there is reason to expect that overqualification of one person has the potential to affect individuals other than the person experiencing it. For example, Gkorezis et al. (2019) predicted, based on crossover theory (Bakker et al. 2009), that employees' perceived overqualification had implications for the life satisfaction of their close social ties (i.e., family members and significant others). Furthermore, close social ties' perceptions that the employee worked in a prestigious organization alleviated the negative effects of overqualification on employees' own perceived career performance and life satisfaction.

When employees feel overqualified, they feel unhappy at work, experience negative health outcomes, and plan to leave their organizations. They also experience negative emotions such as anger (Liu et al. 2015). As a result, it is understandable that individuals close to the employee are also harmed by overqualification. Furthermore, employees who feel overqualified engage in sensemaking processes (Steffy 2017), and employees' significant others or their social networks may play a role in this process. For example, when employees are supported by their significant others for taking a job that is below their skill levels but with greater flexibility, the negative effects of overqualification on their well-being may be alleviated. Given their potentially important role

in how employees make sense of their overqualification and what action they take, future research could benefit from extending the nomological network of overqualification to include individuals beyond the focal person, coworkers, and organization.

What Are the Multilevel Implications of Overqualification?

The overqualification literature has tended to examine overqualification as an individual-level phenomenon, disregarding its emergence at the group level. In reality, studies of overqualification may benefit from a multilevel research approach, with more studies investigating the effects of overqualification composition for group-level outcomes and examining how overqualification of multiple employees within the group could affect group members (Sierra 2011). As a case in point, Erdogan (2020b) found that manager job insecurity did not have a cross-level moderation effect on perceived overqualification with respect to career satisfaction, but such a relationship emerged at the group level (with groups having higher levels of average overqualification having lower levels of career satisfaction when they reported to managers who felt insecure in their jobs).

How does working with overqualified employees affect everyone else? What are the implications of having overqualified peers? To our knowledge, only one study examined the implications of peer overqualification. Hu et al. (2015) examined employees working in 72 groups and treated peer overqualification as a moderator of perceived overqualification. In this study, overqualification had positive effects on in-role performance and citizenship behaviors mediated by task significance and person–group fit. Furthermore, the effects were moderated by peer overqualification such that the positive effects of perceived overqualification were stronger when peers were also overqualified. In other words, overqualification was less beneficial when individuals were considered tokens, working with peers who reported low levels of overqualification, whereas it resulted in the feeling that the person fit in and performed meaningful tasks when peers reported high levels of overqualification. These results suggest that feeling overqualified may result in a sense of social isolation when overqualification is not a shared feeling.

It is also important to understand how overqualification composition within a group affects group and organizational performance. There may be multiple employees who feel overqualified within a group, which may have implications for team dynamics such as information sharing, cohesiveness, and team potency. As a result, examining the effects of average overqualification within a group for team processes and effectiveness will add value to the literature. As Sierra (2011) pointed out, the individual- and group-level effects of overqualification may be different from each other. When several overqualified employees work toward a shared goal, they may feel that they fit in with the group and that their skills complement each other, and as such they may experience greater levels of interpersonal attraction, affecting the group in positive ways.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The overqualification literature has yielded research findings that provide actionable suggestions for employees and organizations. For individuals, the main conclusion of this research is deceptively simple: All else being equal, overqualification is not desirable. Therefore, avoiding situations where they will feel overqualified could yield more positive outcomes in the form of job attitudes and career outcomes. At the same time, in many situations, overqualification is unavoidable because jobs are set up to yield highly overqualified employees, because overqualification happens over time during the employee's career or because overqualification is a result of a decision that provides the employee with other desirable features, such as shorter work hours. In other words, overqualification prevention is not always a viable or desirable strategy.

How can organizations and individuals manage overqualification? There are circumstances when overqualification is more problematic. First, personal differences matter, and overqualification is more of a concern for individuals who have a high desire for growth, higher career calling, higher career centrality, and higher justice sensitivity. In contrast, proactivity and resilience seem to buffer its negative effects. In other words, individuals and organizations may make a more educated judgment by considering the immediate goals and personalities of employees when predicting whether overqualification is likely to be a concern.

Second, context matters and the organization may provide an environment that makes overqualification more or less problematic, and hiring managers would benefit from creating environments where feelings of overqualification are less detrimental. Employees who identify with the organization, find their values in alignment with the organization, and feel that they are supported by the organization seem to cope with feelings of overqualification more effectively. Similarly, a sense of autonomy and empowerment is one of the most consistent moderators of overqualification, suggesting that the presence of autonomy serves as a buffer. Finally, organizational factors matter too: Working in a prestigious organization or working in an organization that directly rewards outcomes results in less negative outcomes for overqualified workers. In other words, overqualification is not a problem for all employees all the time. Instead, its effects are most heightened when employees feel overqualified in a context where there is no room to expand their job, they are not treated well, they are expected to behave the same as everyone else, and they are not encouraged or rewarded for bringing surplus skills and qualifications to the workplace. Presumably, such work contexts are alienating for everyone, but even more so for employees who believe that they are overqualified.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, past research has utilized both perceived and objective measures of overqualification, with most of the focus placed on self-ratings. Future research, therefore, should seek to understand the differential predictions based on overqualification measures. Motivation-based theories, such as relative deprivation theory and person–job fit theory, provide consistent explanations regarding the negative outcomes of overqualification, whereas capability-based perspectives illuminate the positive outcomes of overqualification. Further insight may be gained by combining these approaches. Although most research has focused on the outcomes of overqualification, various antecedents have been identified as significant predictors of overqualification. Additionally, the overqualification literature shows promising relevance to the realm of recruitment and selection. Finally, future research should examine both the within-person and between-person aspects of overqualification while also considering the impact of cultural differences.

FUTURE ISSUES

1. Refine the definition of overqualification by determining whether separate measures (i.e., overeducation, overexperience, overskilling) are needed, understanding the role of social comparisons in shaping employee perceptions of overqualification.
2. Examine how employee perceptions of overqualification change over time in response to changes in work design, leadership, and team context.
3. Determine whether overqualification is a precursor or an outcome of job attitudes and assess factors beyond demographics, personality, and job characteristics that may contribute to overqualification perceptions.

4. Study the implications of employee overqualification for managers, coworkers, other organizational insiders, and those close to the employee.
5. Adopt multilevel approaches to overqualification to understand the implications of overqualification composition of groups and the organizational-level implications of employee overqualification.
6. Assess the implications of national culture and labor market characteristics on the prevalence of overqualification and employee reactions to overqualification.
7. Expand our understanding of when and why recruiters negatively react to overqualified applicants as well as the conditions under which recruiters view overqualified applicants as an investment.

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