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## Conflict or Enrichment? The Effects of Perceived Overqualification on Work-Family Interface

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### Abstract

In recent years, with the popularization of higher education and changes in the economic environment, the phenomenon of employees' perceived overqualification in organizations has become increasingly prevalent, attracting growing attention and discussion from corporate managers and scholars. However, previous research on employees' perceived overqualification has primarily focused on its impact on work attitudes or behaviors of organizational members, while systematic investigation remains lacking regarding whether and how it generates extra-work spillover effects, particularly its influence on work-family relationships. To more deeply explore the effects of employees' perceived overqualification, this study examines the extra-workplace spillover effects and crossover influences of employees' perceived overqualification from two perspectives: the employee's individual work-family relationship and their spouse's family-work relationship. Specifically, first, based on cognitive appraisal theory, we construct a "paradoxical" mediation model of employees' perceived overqualification on their own work-family conflict, thereby revealing its potential double-edged sword effect; second, based on the work-family enrichment model, we explore the dual-path mechanism and boundary conditions of employees' perceived overqualification on their work-family enrichment; third, integrating crossover effects and gender role orientation theory, we explore a crossover effect model of employees' perceived overqualification on their spouse's family-work conflict and family-work enrichment, clarifying the dual moderating roles of employee gender and gender role orientation, thereby deepening and expanding research on the extra-work impacts of employees' perceived overqualification. The relevant findings will not only help reveal the impact of employees' perceived overqualification on work-family relationships from different theoretical perspectives and enrich the existing theoretical foundation, but also provide recommendations for corporate management practice.

## Full Text

### Conflict or Gain? The Effect of Perceived Overqualification on Work-Family Relationships

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#### Abstract

With the popularization of higher education and changing economic conditions, perceived overqualification has become increasingly prevalent among employees, attracting growing attention from both practitioners and scholars. However, existing research has primarily focused on the effects of perceived overqualification on employees' work attitudes and behaviors within organizations, leaving its spillover effects—particularly its impact on work-family relationships—largely unexplored. To address this gap, this study examines the work-to-family spillover and crossover effects of employees' perceived overqualification from two perspectives: employees' own work-family relationships and their spouses' family-work relationships. First, drawing on cognitive appraisal theory, we develop a paradoxical mediation model to reveal the double-edged sword effect of perceived overqualification on employees' work-family conflict. Second, based on the work-family enrichment model, we investigate the dual-path mechanisms and boundary conditions through which perceived overqualification influences work-family enrichment. Third, integrating crossover theory and gender role orientation theory, we explore the crossover effects of perceived overqualification on spouses' family-work conflict and family-work enrichment, clarifying the dual moderating roles of employee gender and gender role orientation. Our findings will not only enrich theoretical understanding of how perceived overqualification affects work-family relationships from multiple perspectives but also provide practical implications for organizational management.

**Keywords:** perceived overqualification, work-family conflict, work-family enrichment

**Classification Number:** B849:C93

## 1. Problem Statement

The 20th Party Congress report has put forward new requirements and deployments for improving people's livelihood, enhancing quality of life, strengthening employment priority policies, and promoting high-quality and full employment. However, with the popularization of higher education and the slowdown of global

economic growth in recent years, labor demand has contracted while job market competition has intensified, leading many job seekers to accept positions below their knowledge, skill, and experience levels. Examples include graduates from top universities like Tsinghua and Peking University working as real estate agents, or Wuhan University graduates working as cleaners. Statistics show that a substantial proportion of employees worldwide believe their qualifications exceed job requirements, with the rate in China reaching nearly 50% (Zheng et al., 2021). When individuals perceive that their qualifications (e.g., knowledge, skills, and work experience) exceed job demands, this creates the phenomenon of “perceived overqualification” (Lee et al., 2021; Maynard et al., 2006).

Scholars have extensively explored the consequences of perceived overqualification. On the negative side, research has shown that perceived overqualification reduces job satisfaction (Arvan et al., 2019) and organizational citizenship behavior (Chen et al., 2017), while increasing turnover intentions (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009), counterproductive work behavior (Liu et al., 2015), time theft (Zhao et al., 2019), and cyberloafing (Cheng et al., 2020). On the positive side, scholars have recognized potential benefits, finding that under certain conditions, perceived overqualification can enhance innovative performance (Lin et al., 2017; Luksyte et al., 2020; Volery & Tarabashkina, 2021; Ma et al., 2018), voice behavior (Erdogan et al., 2020), organizational citizenship behavior, and job performance (Hu et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, these studies have predominantly focused on the effects of perceived overqualification on employees’ work attitudes and behaviors within organizations. For individuals, however, family life constitutes another essential domain, with work and family forming an integrated ecosystem. The quality of work-family relationships significantly impacts individual well-being, life satisfaction, and work productivity (Miller et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2019). As communication technologies and flexible work arrangements increasingly blur the boundaries between work and family, perceived overqualification in the workplace may affect not only work outcomes but also family life. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the extra-organizational spillover effects of perceived overqualification on work-family relationships (Erdogan et al., 2020). Previous research suggests that perceived overqualification may enable employees to handle jobs with ease, leaving more time and energy for family responsibilities and thereby reducing work-to-family conflict (Erdogan et al., 2011). Conversely, it may also generate negative emotions when knowledge and skills are underutilized, disrupting work-family balance (Liu & Wang, 2012). These conflicting perspectives imply that perceived overqualification may exert a double-edged sword effect on work-family balance through paradoxical pathways (Culbertson et al., 2011).

While existing research has made progress in examining perceived overqualification and its outcomes, several important questions remain unanswered. First, the impact of perceived overqualification on work-family relationships remains largely theoretical, with ample room for empirical investigation (Culbertson et

al., 2011). Moreover, existing theoretical discussions have focused exclusively on work-family conflict, neglecting other work-family relationships such as work-family enrichment. Since work-family conflict (conflict arising from resource scarcity) and work-family enrichment (resources gained at work enhancing family performance) represent two fundamental work-family relationships that serve as critical links between work and family domains (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), this study will examine the mechanisms and boundary conditions through which perceived overqualification influences both work-family conflict and work-family enrichment, drawing on cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987) and the work-family enrichment model (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Second, existing research has focused solely on the effects of perceived overqualification on employees themselves, overlooking its crossover effects on spouses. Westman (2001) proposed that an individual's experiences or psychological states can affect others in the same environment, creating crossover effects. As a system, family members inevitably influence one another (Bowen, 1974). Although some studies have mentioned that employees' perceived overqualification may affect family members and friends, empirical research remains scarce (Pedulla & Newman, 2011). Furthermore, work-family influence is bidirectional; beyond work-to-family conflict/enrichment, family-to-work conflict/enrichment also exists. When employees perceive themselves as overqualified, they may allocate extra time, energy, and other resources to support their spouses, such as taking on more household responsibilities or providing constructive advice. Such supportive behaviors can reduce spouses' family-to-work conflict and help them better cope with work challenges, thereby generating family-to-work enrichment (Greenhaus et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2020). However, whether overqualified employees provide more support to their spouses also depends on their gender roles and gender role orientation. According to gender role orientation theory (Korabik et al., 2008), traditional gender divisions of labor ( "men work outside, women care for the home" ) and contemporary gender role orientations shape individuals' perceptions of work and family role divisions (Hernandez Bark et al., 2022), thereby influencing resource allocation between work and family. Building on this, our study integrates crossover theory and gender role orientation theory to investigate how employees' perceived overqualification affects their spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment.

To address these important yet underexplored questions, this study systematically investigates the extra-organizational spillover and crossover effects of employees' perceived overqualification from two perspectives: employees' own work-family relationships and their spouses' family-work relationships. Specifically, first, based on cognitive appraisal theory, we construct a paradoxical mediation model to reveal the double-edged sword effect of perceived overqualification on employees' work-family conflict. Second, drawing on the work-family enrichment model, we examine the dual-path mechanisms and boundary conditions through which perceived overqualification influences work-family enrichment. Third, integrating crossover theory and gender role orientation theory (Korabik

et al., 2008), we develop and test a crossover model of perceived overqualification's effects on spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment, clarifying the dual moderating roles of employee gender and gender role orientation, thereby deepening and extending research on the extra-organizational consequences of perceived overqualification.

### 2.1.1 Conceptualization of Perceived Overqualification

The concept of overqualification evolved from overeducation or underemployment. Scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds have distinguished between objective overqualification and perceived overqualification. Objective overqualification refers to the objective condition where employees' qualifications—such as education level, abilities, and work experience—exceed job demands, representing an objective fact. It can be measured by comparing individuals' actual knowledge, skills, and education levels with those required for specific positions, typically by referencing job descriptions. Perceived overqualification, in contrast, emphasizes individuals' subjective belief that their qualifications (e.g., education, abilities, or experience) exceed job requirements (Maynard et al., 2006).

Since subjective perceptions often have more direct and powerful effects on psychological experiences than objective phenomena (Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013), and objective measures overlook the complexity of overqualification perceivers, perceived overqualification has gained wider application in organizational management and cognitive psychology research. Therefore, this study adopts the perceived overqualification perspective for further investigation.

### 2.1.2 Outcomes of Perceived Overqualification

As a subjective perception, perceived overqualification influences employees' attitudes and behaviors. First, regarding work attitudes and psychological states, existing literature has predominantly documented negative effects. When employees feel overqualified, they believe their knowledge and skills are underutilized and their current positions do not align with their preferences, leading to reduced job satisfaction (Arvan et al., 2019; Maynard et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2022) and career satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2020). Similarly, research shows that such employees experience decreased organizational commitment (Harari et al., 2018) and psychological contract breach (Cheng et al., 2021). Perceived overqualification also generates emotional exhaustion due to feelings of autonomy deprivation, subsequently affecting psychological and life well-being (Erdogan et al., 2018).

Second, these negative attitudinal and psychological reactions further influence behaviors. Research indicates that heightened perceived overqualification triggers negative affective experiences, such as deprivation and dissatisfaction, which in turn lead to higher turnover rates (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009), counterproductive work behavior (Liu et al., 2015; Schreurs et al., 2020), knowledge

hiding (Khan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022), work disengagement (Li et al., 2020), and reduced job performance (Ding et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). Finally, perceived overqualification damages workplace interpersonal relationships, as these employees may alienate colleagues due to their sense of qualification superiority, resulting in interpersonal conflict (Deng et al., 2018).

In recent years, scholars have recognized that perceived overqualification does not always yield negative outcomes and have begun exploring its positive effects. Some studies have uncovered its potential benefits for employee creativity (Dar et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). For instance, research shows that overqualified employees possess capabilities beyond their job requirements, and under certain conditions, they may engage in job crafting to improve their situations, which in turn enhances creativity (Lin et al., 2017). Regarding voice behavior, when overqualified employees perceive high person-organization fit, they are more willing to apply their surplus qualifications to extra-role behaviors, such as providing valuable suggestions to colleagues (Duan et al., 2022; Erdogan et al., 2020). Chu et al. (2018) revealed the double-edged sword effect of newcomer overqualification on organizational citizenship behavior and proactive behavior during interactions with leaders and colleagues. In terms of job performance, scholars have also identified potential positive effects (Hu et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2021; van Dijk et al., 2020). For example, when overqualified employees realize that team members also possess surplus qualifications, they perceive greater job meaning and higher person-organization fit, thereby improving both in-role and extra-role performance (Hu et al., 2015).

### 2.1.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Perceived Overqualification

Based on literature review, three theories are most commonly used in overqualification research: relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1984), person-job fit theory (Liu et al., 2015), and self-evaluation perspective (Erdogan et al., 2020).

Relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1984) posits that overqualification creates feelings of relative deprivation regarding one's job, leading to negative consequences for individuals and organizations. Previous research has validated the mediating role of relative deprivation in the relationships between perceived overqualification and personal well-being (Erdogan et al., 2018) as well as anger and hostility (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015).

Based on person-job fit theory (Maynard et al., 2006; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013), overqualification represents a mismatch between individuals and their jobs, particularly a discrepancy between personal needs and job supplies, which typically produces negative attitudinal and work outcomes. For example, the perceived mismatch from overqualification reduces organizational-based self-esteem and triggers dissatisfaction with one's job situation, subsequently leading to counterproductive work behavior (Liu et al., 2015). Yang and Li's

(2021) meta-analysis also found that perceived overqualification is significantly positively related to negative extra-role behaviors (counterproductive behavior, turnover).

From a self-evaluation perspective (Deng et al., 2018; Erdogan et al., 2020), overqualification reflects surplus skills and qualifications that generate positive self-evaluations. Zhang et al. (2016) found that perceived overqualification enhances role-breadth self-efficacy, which in turn increases proactive behavior. Similarly, Deng et al. (2018) discovered that under certain circumstances, perceived overqualification represents a positive self-evaluation of one's capabilities, leading to greater social acceptance by colleagues.

## 2.2 Perceived Overqualification and Work-Family Relationships

This section reviews research on the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family relationships, focusing on work-family conflict and work-family enrichment as the two most common forms of these relationships. Work-family conflict, grounded in role theory, describes conflicts between work and family role demands due to resource scarcity (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This conflict is bidirectional, encompassing both work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. Scholars have also classified conflict sources into three types: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Time-based conflict occurs when time invested in one role (work or family) interferes with responsibilities in the other role. Strain-based conflict arises when pressure or tension experienced in one domain affects role performance in the other domain. Behavior-based conflict emerges when behavioral patterns developed for one role are incompatible with or create contradictions in the other role.

Work-family enrichment, based on the role enhancement hypothesis, reflects how resources gained in one role domain (work or family)—including skills (e.g., interpersonal abilities), psychological resources (e.g., self-efficacy), social resources (e.g., social networks), flexibility (e.g., flexible work arrangements), and material resources (e.g., economic conditions)—enhance performance in the other role domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). These resources promote work-family enrichment either directly (instrumental path) or indirectly through emotional effects (affective path). Like work-family conflict, work-family enrichment is bidirectional, comprising work-to-family enrichment and family-to-work enrichment. Importantly, work-family conflict and enrichment can co-occur; they are not mutually exclusive. Greenhaus and Powell's (2006) review demonstrated that the mechanisms underlying work-family conflict and enrichment operate independently and are not significantly correlated.

Current research on the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family relationships remains largely theoretical, with limited systematic empirical investigation. Our literature search identified only three papers that

preliminarily examined this relationship, and their findings present considerable controversy. Erdogan et al. (2011) first discussed the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-to-family conflict, arguing that whether overqualification reduces work-to-family conflict depends largely on whether individuals actively choose overqualified positions. When individuals willingly accept jobs below their qualification level, they expect simpler job content, more flexible scheduling, and shorter work hours, which would reduce work-to-family conflict. Culbertson et al. (2011) challenged Erdogan et al.'s (2011) perspective, offering a more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family conflict. They identified three key factors influencing this relationship: (1) the source of work-family conflict (time-based vs. strain-based), as perceived overqualification may reduce time-based conflict while increasing strain-based conflict; (2) the direction of conflict (work-to-family vs. family-to-work), as the effects may differ based on individuals' role centrality; and (3) the relative importance of work and family roles, as different priorities lead to varying levels of work-family or family-work conflict. Liu and Wang (2012) further elaborated on these discussions in their literature review on perceived overqualification.

### 2.3 Brief Review

In summary, although scholars have conducted preliminary explorations of perceived overqualification and work-family relationships separately, systematic research on their interrelationship remains lacking, with several critical issues requiring resolution:

First, the extra-organizational spillover effects of perceived overqualification need further exploration. As our literature review reveals, existing overqualification research has concentrated on its effects on employees' work attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships (Lin et al., 2017; Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016; Ma et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2019). Although a few scholars have theoretically discussed its extra-organizational spillover effects, empirical testing is still lacking (Erdogan et al., 2011). Moreover, this research has been limited to work-to-family conflict, with little examination of other work-family relationships such as work-to-family enrichment or spouses' family-to-work relationships. Scholars have called for systematic and comprehensive exploration of the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family relationships (Erdogan et al., 2011). Therefore, deepening research on the extra-organizational spillover effects of perceived overqualification is necessary.

Second, research perspectives and targets regarding perceived overqualification need expansion. Current research has focused on the effects on employees themselves, including their work attitudes and behaviors. In reality, individuals' experiences or psychological states in the same environment affect others (Westman, 2001), particularly in family settings where members inevitably influence one another (Bowen, 1974). To date, only one study has examined how employees' perceived overqualification affects the life well-being of closely related

individuals, finding that overqualified employees experience lower life well-being, which subsequently reduces the life well-being perceived by their close associates (Gkorezis et al., 2019). Therefore, investigating the relationship between employees' perceived overqualification and their spouses' family-to-work relationships is needed to expand research perspectives and targets.

Third, research on the positive effects of perceived overqualification urgently requires expansion. Most studies have documented negative effects on employees' work attitudes and behaviors. Although scholars have begun to recognize its potential positive effects, such research remains scarce (Erdogan et al., 2020). Our literature review suggests that perceived overqualification does not exert purely positive or negative effects on work-family relationships like work-to-family conflict, but rather may have a double-edged sword effect, with the relationship influenced by other contextual factors (Erdogan et al., 2011). Therefore, in-depth examination of the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family relationships is necessary to fully reveal its underlying mechanisms and enrich positive effect research.

Finally, the theoretical mechanisms underlying perceived overqualification's effects need enrichment. Current research primarily employs three theories: relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1984), person-job fit theory (Liu et al., 2015), and self-evaluation perspective (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Deng et al., 2018), resulting in overly singular theoretical mechanisms. Scholars have called for enriching the theoretical mechanisms of perceived overqualification and providing innovative explanations from different perspectives (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). Therefore, examining the effects of perceived overqualification on work-family relationships from diverse theoretical perspectives is necessary to enrich the existing theoretical foundation.

### 3. Research Framework

This study aims to investigate the extra-organizational spillover and crossover effects of employees' perceived overqualification, with three primary objectives: (1) to reveal the double-edged sword effect of employees' perceived overqualification on their own work-family conflict; (2) to construct a dual-path model (instrumental and affective) of how employees' perceived overqualification affects their work-family enrichment; and (3) to examine the crossover effects of employees' perceived overqualification on their spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment, clarifying the dual moderating roles of employee gender and gender role orientation.

To achieve these objectives, this study comprises three main components: Study 1: The double-edged sword effect of employees' perceived overqualification on work-family conflict; Study 2: The dual-path model of employees' perceived overqualification on work-family enrichment; and Study 3: The crossover effects of employees' perceived overqualification on their spouses' family-to-work relationships. The overall theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1 [Figure

1: see original paper].

### **Figure 1. Overall Research Framework**

*Employee Variables:* Perceived Overqualification

*Employee Characteristics:* Work-family centrality, proactive personality, gender role orientation, employee gender

*Work Process Variables:* Work role overload, career anxiety, work resource acquisition, positive emotion, employee support for spouse

*Work-Family Relationships:* Employee work-family conflict, employee work-family enrichment, spouse family-work conflict, spouse family-work enrichment

## **3.1 Study 1: The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Perceived Overqualification on Work-Family Conflict**

Study 1 examines the double-edged sword effect of employees' perceived overqualification on work-family conflict through the lens of cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Tomaka et al., 1997). According to this theory, individuals evaluate themselves or their circumstances, which influences their immediate responses (e.g., emotions or psychological states) and ultimately produces long-term effects (e.g., physical and mental health, social relationships). The theory categorizes appraisals into four types, with threat appraisal and benefit appraisal being the most common. This study proposes that when employees perceive overqualification, they simultaneously make a benefit appraisal (viewing it as reducing work role overload and thus decreasing time-based work-to-family conflict) and a threat appraisal (perceiving it as a career threat that increases strain-based work-to-family conflict). The research framework is shown in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

### **Figure 2. The Double-Edged Sword Effect of Perceived Overqualification on Work-Family Conflict**

#### **3.1.1 The Mediating Role of Work Role Overload**

On one hand, employees who perceive overqualification make a benefit appraisal, believing that overqualification reduces their work role overload. Work role overload occurs when job responsibilities exceed an individual's available time, abilities, or other resources (Brown et al., 2005; Eissa & Lester, 2017). Overqualified employees perceive their education, abilities, or experience as far exceeding job demands, significantly reducing work pressure. They believe they can efficiently complete their jobs and handle work tasks with ease (Maynard et al., 2006), thus rarely experiencing role overload. Additionally, overqualified employees possess higher self-efficacy and believe they can effectively cope with work demands (Zhang et al., 2016). This positive mindset and emotional state enable them to approach work with abundant energy, further reducing feelings of work role overload. Conversely, when employees' qualifications barely meet or fall short of job requirements, they struggle to manage various tasks and sometimes feel

overwhelmed (Maynard et al., 2006), making them more susceptible to work overload.

On the other hand, work role overload triggers time-based work-to-family conflict. When experiencing work role overload, employees must devote substantial time and energy to work tasks (Brown et al., 2005; Eissa & Lester, 2017), sometimes bringing work home after hours. Individual resources such as time, attention, and energy are limited (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), and different roles impose competing demands that are difficult to satisfy simultaneously. When work roles consume excessive time, individuals have insufficient capacity for family responsibilities, generating time-based work-to-family conflict. Meta-analyses have confirmed that work role overload leads to work-family conflict (Matthews et al., 2014). In summary, this study proposes that perceived overqualification reduces time-based work-to-family conflict by decreasing work role overload.

**Proposition 1:** Work role overload mediates the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and time-based work-to-family conflict.

### 3.1.2 The Mediating Role of Career Anxiety

In addition to reducing time-based work-to-family conflict through decreased work role overload (benefit appraisal), perceived overqualification also increases strain-based work-to-family conflict by generating career anxiety (threat appraisal). Anxiety is an emotional state of psychological distress, characterized by fear and tension triggered by environmental threats (Spielberger, 1966). Career anxiety specifically refers to individuals' concerns and anxious experiences during career development (Pisarik et al., 2017).

This study argues that perceived overqualification is perceived as a potential threat that triggers career anxiety. First, overqualified employees' knowledge and skills are underutilized, depriving them of opportunities and platforms to fully demonstrate their talents (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard et al., 2006). In such situations, employees feel undervalued and unappreciated by the organization (Liu et al., 2015; Yang & Li, 2021), worrying that their career development will stagnate or that they will fail to achieve career goals, thereby generating career anxiety. Second, overqualification represents a job-skill mismatch (Erdogan et al., 2018; Yang & Li, 2021). Overqualified employees typically hold higher expectations for their work and career development, believing they deserve more challenging tasks (Vaisey, 2006). When actual work falls short of these expectations, anxiety ensues. Finally, research indicates that perceived overqualification generates negative emotions such as job and career dissatisfaction (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Erdogan et al., 2018), which in turn contribute to career anxiety. Based on these arguments, we propose that perceived overqualification leads to career anxiety.

This career anxiety subsequently generates strain-based work-to-family conflict. Scholars note that strain-based work-to-family conflict occurs when pressure or tension experienced at work interferes with family roles and responsibilities

(Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work experiences often spill over into family life, creating similar feelings that affect role performance in the family domain (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), with emotional spillover being one of the most important causal mechanisms linking work and family (Lambert, 1990). When individuals experience anxiety at work, they often unconsciously extend these negative emotions into family life, adopting negative attitudes toward family members and responsibilities, thereby triggering strain-based work-to-family conflict (McNall et al., 2015). Moreover, negative emotions impair individuals' ability to effectively handle life stressors and challenges (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), making work-family conflict more likely. Meta-analyses have shown that employees' negative emotions contribute to work-family conflict (Allen & Kiburz, 2012). In summary, this study proposes that perceived overqualification generates strain-based work-to-family conflict through career anxiety.

**Proposition 2:** Career anxiety mediates the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and strain-based work-to-family conflict.

### 3.1.3 The Moderating Role of Work-Family Centrality

Cognitive appraisal theory suggests that individuals' different appraisals of the same situation largely depend on their goal hierarchy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Tomaka et al., 1997). Work-family centrality describes the relative importance of work and family in individuals' lives, reflecting their goal priorities for participating in work and family activities (Paullay et al., 1994). Work-centered employees view work as the more important and central component of their lives, prioritizing work-oriented goals and allocating more resources such as time and energy to work (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Conversely, family-centered employees prioritize family, arranging daily activities based on family importance and sometimes forgoing promotion opportunities to preserve family time (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017).

When employees are work-centered, they seek career advancement and growth, willingly sacrificing other activities or social life to advance their careers (Noe et al., 1990). They pursue positions that match their abilities and values and exert greater effort to achieve career goals (Greenhaus, 1971). Perceived overqualification implies that employees cannot fully utilize their knowledge, skills, and potential (Wassermann et al., 2017). Therefore, when these work-centered employees perceive overqualification, they do not experience reduced work pressure or overload because they actively seek more job responsibilities and challenging work. Instead, they experience stronger feelings of self-worth loss and person-job mismatch, becoming more concerned about career stagnation or failure to achieve career goals (Erdogan et al., 2018). Research has confirmed that work centrality strengthens the career dissatisfaction resulting from perceived overqualification (Erdogan et al., 2018). Thus, we propose that work centrality weakens the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work role overload while strengthening its positive relationship with career anxiety.

When employees are family-centered, they focus their lives on family, dedicating primary time and energy to caring for family and fulfilling family responsibilities (Eldor & Vigoda-Gadot, 2017). Since individual resources such as time and energy are limited (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000), overqualification helps these employees efficiently complete work tasks, reduce work pressure, and gain more time or flexibility to fulfill family duties. Scholars have suggested that family-centered employees often actively choose overqualified jobs precisely because this allows them to engage in non-work responsibilities and interests (Culbertson et al., 2011). Moreover, family-centered employees place less emphasis on career achievement and growth prospects, so they do not experience career anxiety even when perceiving overqualification. Therefore, we propose that family centrality strengthens the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work role overload while weakening its positive relationship with career anxiety.

**Proposition 3a:** Work-family centrality moderates the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work role overload, such that the negative relationship is weaker when employees are work-centered and stronger when they are family-centered.

**Proposition 3b:** Work-family centrality moderates the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and career anxiety, such that the positive relationship is stronger when employees are work-centered and weaker when they are family-centered.

## 3.2 Study 2: Dual-Path Model of Perceived Overqualification' s Effect on Work-Family Enrichment

Study 2 examines the effects, mechanisms, and boundary conditions of perceived overqualification on work-family enrichment based on the work-family enrichment model (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The research framework is shown in Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper].

### Figure 3. Dual-Path Model of Perceived Overqualification' s Effect on Work-Family Enrichment

#### 3.2.1 The Mediating Role of Work Resource Acquisition

The work-family enrichment model proposes that work-to-family enrichment occurs through instrumental and affective paths (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). The instrumental path involves resources gained in one role being directly transferred to another role to enhance performance in that role. These resources include skills and perspectives, psychological resources, social capital, flexibility, and material resources. This study proposes that perceived overqualification negatively affects work-family enrichment through the instrumental path by reducing work resource acquisition.

First, perceived overqualification is negatively related to work resource acquisition, particularly regarding skill resources and psychological resources. When

employees perceive overqualification, their knowledge, skills, or experience exceed job demands (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard et al., 2006). Job content lacks challenge, knowledge and skills are underutilized, and potential remains untapped, providing few opportunities to learn new skills or knowledge perspectives. Additionally, perceived overqualification does not generate psychological resources such as organizational-based self-esteem. Overqualified employees feel undervalued and unappreciated by the organization, with their personal worth diminished (Liu et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). While overqualified employees may complete tasks more efficiently and experience reduced work pressure, work schedule flexibility is largely constrained by organizational policies (Allen et al., 2013), so overqualified employees do not necessarily acquire flexible time resources. Therefore, this study proposes that perceived overqualification is negatively related to work resource acquisition.

Second, work resource acquisition promotes work-family enrichment. The work-family enrichment model (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006) indicates that resources acquired at work enhance quality of life. For example, leadership skills learned at work can help in parenting, and time management skills can improve efficiency in handling household tasks. The positive relationship between work resource acquisition and work-family enrichment has been supported in previous research (Chen & Powell, 2012). Meta-analyses have further found that various resources acquired at work—such as job satisfaction, social networks, job autonomy, and job complexity—all enhance work-family enrichment (Lapierre et al., 2018; McNall et al., 2010). In summary, this study proposes that perceived overqualification negatively affects work-family enrichment by hindering work resource acquisition.

**Proposition 4:** Work resource acquisition mediates the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family enrichment.

### 3.2.2 The Mediating Role of Positive Emotion

Work-to-family enrichment also occurs through the affective path, whereby positive emotions acquired at work enhance family life quality (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This study proposes that perceived overqualification reduces employees' positive emotions—characterized by feelings of excitement, happiness, and pleasure (Tellegen et al., 1999). Perceived overqualification means employees' knowledge, skills, and experience are not fully utilized (Maynard et al., 2006), making it difficult for them to feel satisfied with their work and display positive emotions (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Erdogan et al., 2018). Moreover, overqualified employees cannot participate in challenging work tasks (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard et al., 2006), preventing them from experiencing the excitement or joy such tasks provide. Empirical research has consistently found that perceived overqualification generates negative emotions such as anger (Chen et al., 2017; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015) and depression (Wassermann & Hoppe, 2019).

Conversely, positive emotion promotes work-family enrichment. First, positive

emotions stimulate prosocial motivation and altruistic behavior, making employees more willing to assume family responsibilities and effectively address potential family issues, whereas negative emotions do not produce such positive effects (Isen & Baron, 1991). Second, emotions affect attentional focus; individuals experiencing negative emotions concentrate more on themselves than on others during interactions, hindering effective communication and reducing family well-being (McNall et al., 2015). Finally, individuals with negative emotions lack sufficient capacity and energy to actively engage in other roles such as family life (Marks, 1977; McNall et al., 2015). Therefore, this study proposes that perceived overqualification impedes work-family enrichment by undermining positive emotion.

**Proposition 5:** Positive emotion mediates the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family enrichment.

### 3.2.3 The Chain Mediating Role of Work Resource Acquisition and Positive Emotion

According to the work-family enrichment model, the instrumental and affective paths are not mutually exclusive; the instrumental path directly affects performance in the other role while also enhancing role quality through the affective path (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This study proposes that perceived overqualification negatively affects work-family enrichment through the chain mediation of work resource acquisition and positive emotion.

Work resource acquisition generates positive emotion. Resources acquired at work—including skills and perspectives, psychological resources, social capital, work flexibility, and material resources—help employees effectively cope with negative phenomena such as person-job mismatch and injustice, thereby enhancing job satisfaction, well-being, and positive emotion (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). For example, new knowledge and skills can facilitate career development and advancement, create promotion opportunities, and improve performance (Ren & Chadee, 2017), leading to greater happiness (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Psychological resources such as organizational-based self-efficacy enable employees to believe they can face career challenges (Cai et al., 2015; Isen & Baron, 1991), fostering a more positive mindset toward work uncertainties and difficulties. Therefore, employees who acquire work resources are more likely to experience positive emotion. Combined with previous arguments, this study proposes that overqualified employees' inability to acquire work resources reduces positive emotion and consequently hinders work-family enrichment.

**Proposition 6:** Perceived overqualification negatively affects work-family enrichment through the sequential mediation of work resource acquisition and positive emotion.

### 3.2.4 The Moderating Role of Employee Proactivity

Greenhaus and Powell (2006) suggested that individual characteristics or dispositions, such as how proactivity influences resource accumulation and operates in different paths of the work-family enrichment model, warrant attention. Proactive personality is a relatively stable trait describing individuals' tendency to change their environment or circumstances (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Proactive individuals excel at identifying opportunities, taking action, and persisting until they make valuable and meaningful impacts or changes. This study proposes that proactive personality helps overqualified employees acquire more work resources and generate positive emotion.

Highly proactive employees seek alignment between their needs and abilities, actively changing environmental conditions to achieve fit between job demands/resources and individual needs/capabilities (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Research shows that proactive employees are more likely to engage in job crafting behaviors, including increasing job resources and enhancing job challenges (Bakker et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, when these employees perceive overqualification, they are likely to proactively seek more challenging tasks to achieve alignment between their qualifications and work, satisfying their career development needs. These behaviors help overqualified employees acquire more work resources, increase job satisfaction, and generate positive emotion.

Conversely, employees low in proactivity accept current situations passively (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Even when perceiving overqualification, they do not take active steps to change their circumstances and struggle to acquire work resources. Moreover, without proactivity, overqualified employees have few opportunities to engage in challenging and complex tasks, preventing them from fully utilizing their value and potential and experiencing the pleasure and sense of accomplishment that work can provide.

**Proposition 7a:** Proactive personality moderates the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work resource acquisition, such that the negative relationship is weaker when employees are highly proactive and stronger when employees are low in proactivity.

**Proposition 7b:** Proactive personality moderates the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and positive emotion, such that the negative relationship is weaker when employees are highly proactive and stronger when employees are low in proactivity.

### 3.3 Study 3: Crossover Effects of Perceived Overqualification on Spouses' Family-to-Work Relationships

Employees' perceived overqualification affects not only their own work-family relationships but also their spouses' work-family relationships (Westman, 2001). Study 3 integrates crossover theory (Westman, 2001) and gender role orientation

theory (Korabik et al., 2003) to examine how employees' perceived overqualification influences their spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment. The research framework is shown in Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper].

#### **Figure 4. Crossover Effects of Perceived Overqualification on Spouses' Family-to-Work Relationships**

##### **3.3.1 The Moderating Role of Employee Gender**

According to social role theory, individuals tend to conform to gender role expectations arising from social functional divisions and eventually internalize these expectations (Eagly et al., 1995; Eagly & Kite, 1987). Traditional gender norms assign greater work responsibilities to men and more family caregiving duties to women. Once these gender expectations become institutionalized in labor market divisions, gender role identification motivates individuals to normalize their behavior, thereby reinforcing these social gender roles (Eagly & Kite, 1987; Zhao et al., 2019).

When employees perceive overqualification, they can handle work tasks with relative ease (Maynard et al., 2006), leaving them with extra time, energy, and other resources to provide more support to their spouses, such as taking on more household responsibilities or offering constructive advice (Greenhaus et al., 2012). Support provided by one family member to another, including help, advice, and understanding, is defined as spousal support (Ocampo et al., 2018). Therefore, perceived overqualification may have a potential positive relationship with spousal support. However, due to different gender-based divisions of work and family responsibilities, this study proposes that gender influences the support overqualified employees provide to their spouses. Traditional gender roles and social norms encourage men to pursue career success and assume more work roles rather than family roles (Eagly & Kite, 1987). Therefore, when overqualified employees are male, they may invest more energy in seeking challenging tasks or other resources to improve their work situation and achieve career aspirations. In such cases, men are less likely to allocate remaining time, energy, or resources to support their spouses and assume family roles, weakening the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and spousal support. Conversely, social norms encourage women to invest more in the family and prioritize family responsibilities (Eagly & Kite, 1987; Zhao et al., 2019). Therefore, when women face overqualification, they naturally shift their focus to family life and provide more support to their spouses. The common "glass ceiling" phenomenon in workplaces indirectly supports this argument.

**Proposition 8:** Employee gender moderates the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and spousal support, such that the positive relationship is stronger for female employees and weaker for male employees.

Spousal support represents an important form of social support (Ocampo et al., 2018) that provides various resources including emotional (security), instru-

mental (problem-solving assistance), tangible (caring for children), and informational (advice and suggestions) support. These resources help spouses share family responsibilities, reducing family-to-work conflict. They also enhance work quality, as family-provided information or advice helps solve work problems, and family support enables spouses to engage in work with more energy and a positive mindset. The relationships between spousal support and spouses' family-to-work conflict (Michel et al., 2011) and family-to-work enrichment (Lapierre et al., 2018) have been supported in previous meta-analyses. Therefore, based on Proposition 8, this study proposes a moderated mediation model in which employee gender moderates the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment through spousal support.

**Proposition 9a:** Employee gender moderates the indirect negative relationship between perceived overqualification and spouses' family-to-work conflict via spousal support, such that the indirect negative relationship is stronger when employees are female and weaker when employees are male.

**Proposition 9b:** Employee gender moderates the indirect positive relationship between perceived overqualification and spouses' family-to-work enrichment via spousal support, such that the indirect positive relationship is stronger when employees are female and weaker when employees are male.

### 3.3.2 The Three-Way Interaction of Perceived Overqualification, Gender, and Gender Role Orientation

Gender role orientation theory (Korabik et al., 2003) suggests that individuals of the same gender may differ in their endorsement of gender role expectations (Korabik et al., 2003). Based on previous research (Livingston & Judge, 2008), attitudes toward gender roles can be categorized as egalitarian gender role orientation or traditional gender role orientation, representing opposite ends of the spectrum of social gender role expectation endorsement. Individuals with traditional gender role orientation believe men should assume more work responsibilities with work prioritized over family, while women should fulfill family roles with family prioritized over work. Research shows that when dealing with work-family issues, individuals with traditional gender role orientation exhibit greater gender role differences compared to those with egalitarian orientations (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2007). Therefore, examining how gender role orientation influences overqualified individuals' spousal support is important.

When overqualified female employees hold traditional gender role orientation, they endorse the belief that women should focus more on family (Zhao et al., 2019) and are more willing to transfer post-work resources to better meet family responsibility demands and provide spousal support. When these female employees hold egalitarian orientation, they value their own work and career roles, striving to balance family and work roles rather than focusing solely on family as their spouse's domestic support (Kailasapathy & Metz, 2012).

Gender role orientation plays an opposite moderating role for male employees. When overqualified male employees hold traditional gender role orientation, they endorse socially prescribed role divisions where men should focus on work rather than family (Eagly & Kite, 1987; Zhao et al., 2019). Therefore, these employees will not invest post-work resources such as time and attention into family to share family responsibilities or care about problems their spouses encounter at work or in life. Conversely, if these men hold egalitarian orientation, they believe work and family demands are equally important (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Compared to traditionally oriented men, they are more aware of work-family balance and thus more likely to shift their focus to family and provide more support to their spouses when facing overqualification.

**Proposition 10:** Perceived overqualification, gender, and gender role orientation interact to influence spousal support, such that the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and spousal support is stronger for women with traditional gender role orientation and weaker for women with egalitarian orientation; conversely, the positive relationship is weaker for men with traditional gender role orientation and stronger for men with egalitarian orientation.

Based on the role of spousal support in reducing family-to-work conflict and promoting family-to-work enrichment, and the three-way interaction of perceived overqualification, gender, and gender role orientation on spousal support, this study proposes a three-way moderated mediation model in which the interaction of perceived overqualification, employee gender, and gender role orientation influences spouses' family-to-work relationships through spousal support.

**Proposition 11a:** Perceived overqualification, gender, and gender role orientation interact to influence spouses' family-to-work conflict through spousal support, such that the indirect negative relationship is stronger for women with traditional gender role orientation and weaker for women with egalitarian orientation; conversely, the indirect negative relationship is weaker for men with traditional gender role orientation and stronger for men with egalitarian orientation.

**Proposition 11b:** Perceived overqualification, gender, and gender role orientation interact to influence spouses' family-to-work enrichment through spousal support, such that the indirect positive relationship is stronger for women with traditional gender role orientation and weaker for women with egalitarian orientation; conversely, the indirect positive relationship is weaker for men with traditional gender role orientation and stronger for men with egalitarian orientation.

#### 4. Theoretical Contributions

This study examines the extra-organizational spillover and crossover effects of employees' perceived overqualification from the perspectives of employees' own work-family relationships and their spouses' family-to-work relationships. On one hand, it deepens understanding of the effects, mechanisms, and bound-

ary conditions of perceived overqualification on employees' work-family conflict and work-family enrichment, addressing theoretical controversies and responding to calls for more empirical research. On the other hand, it investigates the crossover effects of one family member's perceived overqualification on their spouse's family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment, thereby deepening and extending research on the extra-organizational consequences of perceived overqualification. This study aims to answer three research questions.

First, how does the double-edged sword effect of perceived overqualification on work-family conflict manifest? Current theoretical discussions present considerable controversy regarding the relationship between perceived overqualification and work-family conflict. A key challenge is explaining the sources of this controversy. This study argues that the controversy arises because perceived overqualification exerts paradoxical effects on different dimensions of work-family conflict through distinct mechanisms. Using cognitive appraisal theory as a framework, we develop a double-edged sword model of perceived overqualification's effects on time-based and strain-based work-family conflict to effectively address this controversy. We propose that when employees perceive overqualification, they simultaneously view it as beneficial (reducing work role overload and thus time-based conflict) and threatening (increasing career anxiety and thus strain-based conflict). The specific appraisal employees make depends on their priorities regarding work and family life: family-centered employees are more likely to perceive reduced work role overload, whereas work-centered employees are more prone to career anxiety.

Second, how does perceived overqualification influence employees' work-family enrichment? Balancing work-family relationships requires not only reducing work-family conflict but also promoting work-family enrichment as a sustainable long-term solution. This study expands the family-related outcome variables of perceived overqualification by revealing its effects on work-family enrichment and clarifying its multifaceted influences. Specifically, drawing on the work-family enrichment model, we construct a dual-path model (instrumental and affective) of perceived overqualification's effects on work-family enrichment, testing the mechanisms and boundary conditions. We argue that overqualified employees struggle to acquire work resources, which hinders work-family enrichment, and also experience reduced positive emotion, further diminishing enrichment. However, proactive personality can mitigate these negative effects by helping overqualified employees acquire more resources and increase positive emotion, thereby promoting work-family enrichment.

Third, through what pathways does perceived overqualification crossover to affect spouses' family-to-work relationships, and how do employee gender and gender role orientation exert dual moderating effects? Previous research on perceived overqualification has primarily focused on its effects on employees themselves, such as job satisfaction, performance, and turnover (Arvan et al., 2019; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Zhao et al., 2019), with scarce investigation of its crossover effects on other individuals and limited discussion of underlying

mechanisms. This study integrates crossover theory and gender role orientation theory (Korabik et al., 2003) to develop and test a crossover model of perceived overqualification's effects on spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment, revealing the mediating mechanism of spousal support and clarifying the dual moderating roles of employee gender and gender role orientation. We propose that both between-gender differences (male vs. female) and within-gender differences (traditional vs. egalitarian gender role orientation) moderate the relationship between perceived overqualification and spousal support. Specifically, women facing overqualification are more inclined to provide spousal support, thereby enhancing spouses' family-to-work enrichment and reducing family-to-work conflict, whereas men facing overqualification provide less spousal support, thereby increasing spouses' family-to-work conflict and reducing enrichment. These differences are more pronounced among individuals with traditional gender role orientations.

In summary, this study's contributions are manifested in three aspects. First, regarding outcome variables, it extends perceived overqualification research from within-work effects to extra-organizational effects by examining its impact on both work-family conflict and work-family enrichment. While scholars have extensively studied perceived overqualification, existing literature has focused on its effects on employees' work attitudes and behaviors within organizations, such as job satisfaction, performance, and turnover (Arvan et al., 2019; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Zhao et al., 2019), neglecting its spillover effects outside the workplace, particularly on work-family relationships.

Second, regarding effect patterns, it expands the single-effect perspective to a double-edged sword framework, helping reconcile contradictory views in existing literature and enriching empirical research on the positive effects of perceived overqualification. Scholars have theoretically debated the potential effects of perceived overqualification on work-family relationships with conflicting conclusions (Culbertson et al., 2011; Liu & Wang, 2012). This study aims to reconcile these contradictions by revealing the paradoxical mechanisms underlying these effects. Moreover, while most research has focused on negative effects, this study identifies positive effects on family-to-work relationships, overcoming the limitation of previous studies that predominantly emphasized negative consequences (Harari et al., 2017) and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of perceived overqualification's advantages and disadvantages.

Third, regarding research targets, it extends the focus from individual effects to crossover effects on spouses, enriching research on cross-individual influences and the scope of overqualification effects. Existing research has concentrated on perceived overqualification's effects on employees themselves, overlooking crossover effects on other individuals. This study innovatively introduces spouses' work-family relationships as outcome variables, examining how employees' perceived overqualification affects spouses' family-to-work conflict and family-to-work enrichment, thereby addressing gaps in the literature. Additionally, by integrating gender role orientation theory (Korabik et al., 2003),

this study identifies boundary conditions for the crossover effects of perceived overqualification, enriching contextual factors in crossover research.

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