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Authors: Zhang Jianping, Zhang Guanglei, Liu Shanshi, Zhou Guolin, Li Jianling, Zhang Guanglei

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Abstract

Perceived overqualification refers to an individual's subjective perception that their qualifications exceed the actual requirements of their job. In various contemporary organizations, the phenomenon of overqualification is prevalent, and the effects of perceived overqualification have garnered extensive attention from scholars worldwide. However, previous research has predominantly focused on examining the negative effects of perceived overqualification at the individual level, while the exploration of its potential positive effects has been relatively insufficient, and attention to team-level perceived overqualification has been neglected. To address this gap, this study will integrate compositional and compilation approaches to analyze and explore the composition of perceived overqualification in team contexts and its consequential effects. The research will primarily investigate three aspects: first, the positive influence of team perceived overqualification composition on team work outcomes; second, the cross-level positive effects of team perceived overqualification composition on individual work outcomes; and third, the variation in the positive effects of individual perceived overqualification on work outcomes under conditions of team differentiation in perceived overqualification. This study is expected to expand research on perceived overqualification in team contexts and provide better guidance for organizational management practice.

Full Text

The Positive Effects of Perceived Overqualification in Team Contexts: An Integrated Composition and Compilation Approach

ZHANG Jianping¹, ZHANG Guanglei², LIU Shanshi³, ZHOU Guolin¹, LI Jianling⁴

¹ School of Business Administration, Guangdong University of Finance, Guangzhou 510521, China

² School of Management, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan 430070, China

³ School of Business Administration, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510641, China

⁴ School of Political and Economic Management, Guizhou Minzu University, Guiyang 550025, China

Abstract

Perceived overqualification (POQ) refers to the subjective feeling that an individual's qualifications exceed the actual requirements of their job. In contemporary organizations, overqualification has become a widespread phenomenon, attracting considerable scholarly attention both domestically and internationally. However, previous research has primarily focused on the negative effects of POQ at the individual level, with insufficient exploration of its potential positive effects and limited attention to team-level POQ. This study integrates composition and compilation approaches to analyze and explore the composition of POQ in team contexts and its influence effects. The research focuses on three aspects: First, it investigates the positive impact of team POQ composition on team work outcomes; second, it examines the cross-level positive influence of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes; and third, it explores how individual POQ affects work outcomes under conditions of team POQ differentiation. This study is expected to extend POQ research in team contexts and provide better guidance for organizational management practice.

Keywords: team composition of perceived overqualification, individual work outcomes, team work outcomes, team differentiation, cross-level effects

Classification Code: B849: C93

1. Introduction

In recent years, the phenomenon of “high education, low employment” has frequently appeared on the internet and sparked widespread discussion among netizens, with examples such as university graduates working full-time as ride-hailing drivers or food delivery personnel. Alongside the vigorous development of higher education in China, the proportion of labor force with higher education has risen steadily. In this context, the employment situation for fresh graduates, especially from non-prestigious universities, has become increasingly

severe. As Professor Huang Deng noted in a Tencent News interview, “The situation where graduates from a second-tier university in the Pearl River Delta around 2010 would have two or three job offers upon graduation no longer exists.” Additionally, Zheng et al. (2021) examined the issue of overeducation in China based on a sample of approximately 20,000 resumes and 20,000 job postings from Zhaopin.com, concluding that overeducation is widespread and results in a salary penalty—about half of the job seekers in their data had education levels exceeding job requirements, yet received significantly lower salaries than they would have in positions matching their qualifications.

In academic research, this “high education, low employment” phenomenon is defined as “overqualification,” meaning that an employee’s education, work experience, knowledge, and skills exceed the actual requirements of their job (Zhang et al., 2020). According to authoritative survey data, approximately 47% of employees worldwide believe their qualifications exceed job requirements, while in China this proportion reaches as high as 84% (Lin et al., 2017). However, organizational attitudes toward overqualification are paradoxical: companies hope to attract talented individuals to facilitate faster and better development, yet worry that overqualified employees may be “dissatisfied with their status quo” and exhibit poor initiative, potentially producing counterproductive results. For instance, a quasi-experimental study of hiring managers published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ) showed that managers tend to eliminate job candidates whose abilities far exceed job requirements when screening resumes, believing that overqualified candidates demonstrate lower employer commitment, are more difficult to motivate by the organization’s mission and goals, and are more likely to leave for better opportunities, thus preferring candidates with slightly lower but sufficient capabilities (Galperin et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Thompson et al. (2013), in their reflection on underemployment and overqualification in organizations, argued that hiring overqualified candidates would benefit organizational development and that companies should and can achieve a win-win outcome on this issue. So, is employee overqualification in organizations beneficial or detrimental to work outcomes?

In the field of organizational behavior and human resource management (OBHRM), scholars primarily focus on perceived overqualification (POQ) rather than objective overqualification, as only when the latter is perceived by individuals does it trigger psychological experiences and behavioral responses. A review of existing literature reveals that researchers have mainly concentrated on the negative effects of POQ on individuals, examining the negative psychological experiences and passive behavioral reactions triggered by POQ (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Liu et al., 2015; Luksyte et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2019). Some scholars have begun exploring the positive effects and non-linear effects of POQ on individuals (Lin et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). However, existing research remains divided on the impact of POQ on job performance and interpersonal relationships, with meta-analytic results showing that the relationships between POQ and work performance

(innovation, task performance) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) are not significant (Harari et al., 2017; Yang & Li, 2021). Consequently, scholars have suggested that further investigation is needed to uncover the potential positive effects of POQ on work outcomes and their underlying mechanisms (Van Dijk et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021).

Moreover, existing research has rarely explored the effects of POQ at the team level or across levels. Nowadays, as the dynamism and complexity of organizational environments continue to increase, teams have become more prevalent in organizations and constitute the most basic work unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). Scholars have thus called for more cross-level research on POQ (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Sierra, 2011; Li et al., 2021). Unlike individual POQ, which tends to trigger negative psychological experiences, team-level POQ may positively influence member interactions and actions. For example, Hu et al. (2015) confirmed that the mean level of colleague POQ positively moderates the indirect positive effect of individual POQ on individual performance, while Ma et al. (2019) found that team POQ mean can mitigate or even reverse the negative effects of individual POQ. Second, previous research has primarily operationalized team POQ through simple aggregation or averaging of all members' POQ, neglecting team differentiation of POQ (measured by standard deviation), with only a few scholars attempting to address this gap (Cheng et al., 2021a). It is not difficult to imagine that in two teams, A and B, with equal POQ means, if all members in Team A have average POQ levels while Team B shows large dispersion in POQ, members in Team A are more likely to view the team as a unified whole, thereby enhancing mutual collaboration and communication and benefiting team outcomes. In contrast, members in Team B may form team faultlines or subgroups due to POQ differentiation, hindering mutual interaction and ultimately damaging team outcomes. Therefore, when exploring the effects of POQ in team contexts, it is necessary to consider the joint effects of team mean and team differentiation.

In summary, this study integrates composition (team mean) and compilation (team differentiation) approaches to analyze and explore the composition of POQ in team contexts and its potential positive effects, examining how team POQ composition promotes team and individual work outcomes. The study focuses on three key questions: First, drawing on social identity theory and the input-process-output (I-P-O) framework, it examines the impact of team POQ composition on positive team processes and team work outcomes; second, based on social identity theory, it explores the cross-level effects of team POQ composition on individual team identification and work outcomes; third, combining expectation states theory and social identity theory, it examines how individual POQ influences informal status and work outcomes under conditions of team POQ differentiation. Overall, this study develops a multilevel theoretical model of POQ effects in team contexts, aiming to uncover the potential positive effects of POQ in team settings, extend POQ research, and provide reference for organizational management practice.

2.1 The Connotation and Measurement of Perceived Overqualification

The concept of overqualification (also called “over-competence”) originates from research on underemployment in labor economics and represents a skill-based sub-dimension of underemployment (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), referring to situations where an individual’s education, work experience, skills, and abilities exceed the actual requirements of their job (Maynard et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2020). As research has evolved, scholars have distinguished between objective overqualification and perceived overqualification (POQ). The former is typically measured by calculating the gap between an individual’s objective qualifications (e.g., education, skill certificates) and job requirements (Arvan et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2017), while POQ is measured by asking individuals about their subjective feelings of being overqualified (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maltarich et al., 2011). Comparative research reveals two major weaknesses of objective overqualification: First, it is difficult to effectively measure surplus in subjective knowledge, experience, and skills, with previous research primarily focusing on objective overeducation (Arvan et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2017), a practice many scholars consider one-sided (Maltarich et al., 2011). Second, objective overqualification only triggers subsequent psychological experiences and behavioral responses when perceived by individuals, meaning POQ is a more proximal factor affecting individual attitudes and behaviors (Lin et al., 2017; Liu & Wang, 2012). Consequently, OBHRM research has primarily focused on the effects of POQ (Liu & Wang, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016).

Regarding POQ measurement, various instruments exist in academia. Early POQ scales included two dimensions: qualification mismatch and lack of development (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Fine and Nevo (2008) expanded the connotation of POQ and adapted a 9-item Perceived Cognitive Overqualification Questionnaire (PCOQ) targeting individual cognitive abilities, including cognitive mismatch and cognitive lack of development dimensions, though few subsequent studies have adopted this measure. However, as research has progressed, an increasing number of scholars view POQ as a unidimensional construct, with many studies showing that lack of development and qualification mismatch are highly distinct, leading researchers to gradually abandon the lack of development dimension (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011; Zhang et al., 2016).

Consequently, scholars have developed unidimensional POQ scales. For example, Bolino and Feldman (2000) developed a 13-item scale for expatriate workers, primarily measuring their sense of underutilization regarding education, work experience, and abilities. Maynard et al. (2006) developed a 9-item scale encompassing education level, work experience, skills, and abilities, which is currently the most frequently used POQ scale. Sánchez-Cardona et al. (2020) also developed a 5-item scale.

2.2 Research on Antecedents of Perceived Overqualification

Perceived overqualification (POQ) is influenced by numerous factors, including demographic variables, personality traits, workplace relationships, job characteristics, and objective overqualification (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Liu & Wang, 2012). First, regarding demographic factors, Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis shows that while gender and age are not significantly related to POQ, education level is significantly positively correlated with POQ ($r = 0.08$), meaning highly educated individuals tend to have higher POQ, though high POQ is not limited to those with high education (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). Additionally, job tenure is significantly negatively correlated with POQ ($r = -0.14$), indicating that newcomers tend to have higher POQ. Second, concerning personality traits, Maynard et al. (2015), Lobene et al. (2015), and Cheng (2020) all found that narcissism or some of its dimensions are significantly positively correlated with POQ, while Debus et al. (2020) found that negative affectivity is negatively correlated with POQ. Third, regarding workplace relationships, Alfes et al. (2016) found that LMX quality and team cohesion are significantly negatively correlated with POQ. Fourth, concerning job characteristics, Lobene et al. (2015) found that uniform dress codes and repetitive tasks at work are strong predictors of POQ, while Cheng (2020) found that job control significantly positively affects POQ. Fifth, although POQ is influenced by the above factors, objective overqualification is generally considered its most important antecedent (Liu & Wang, 2012). Studies by Lin et al. (2017) and Arvan et al. (2019) show that objective overqualification is significantly positively correlated with POQ, and Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis also reveals a moderate positive correlation between the two ($r = 0.40$).

2.3 Research on Negative Effects of Perceived Overqualification

(1) Negative Effects of POQ on Cognitive Perceptions and Emotional Experiences. POQ negatively affects employees' cognitive perceptions of their organization and job. First, the mismatch and unfairness brought by POQ reduce employees' perceived organizational support and insider status cognition (Li et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2018) and increase their job insecurity (Peiró et al., 2012), amplifying their psychological distance from the organization (He & Zhang, 2020). Second, employees with high POQ cannot obtain challenging demands at work, thereby reducing their perceptions of job accomplishment, control, and autonomy (Simon et al., 2019; Zhao & Peng, 2020). POQ also decreases employees' recognition of job value and creates job alienation (Xie et al., 2015). Finally, POQ leads employees to question their abilities and value, thereby reducing organization-based self-esteem and core self-evaluation (Liu et al., 2015; Cheng et al., 2019). POQ also makes employees highly confident in their abilities and generates more superiority, thereby increasing psychological entitlement (Chu & Wang, 2019). Employees with higher POQ tend to believe they have not reached their deserved status, thus experiencing stronger relative

deprivation and moral disengagement (Erdogan et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). POQ also triggers negative emotional reactions. Zhao et al. (2015) found that POQ increases employees' experience of psychological contract breach. Zhang et al. (2021) confirmed that the person-job mismatch caused by POQ generates anger directed at the organization. Sánchez-Cardona et al. (2020) found that POQ increases employees' boredom at work. Cheng et al. (2020), based on equity theory, found that the unfairness triggered by POQ reduces employees' harmonious passion. Additionally, Zhao et al. (2019), from a conservation of resources perspective, confirmed that POQ triggers negative emotions, reduces positive emotions, and intensifies resource loss, thereby increasing emotional exhaustion.

(2) Negative Effects of POQ on Work Attitudes, Work Behaviors, Job Performance, and Physical/Mental Health.

Work Attitudes. POQ significantly affects job satisfaction, career satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Arvan et al. (2019) found that objective overqualification significantly reduces employees' job satisfaction through the mediating effect of POQ. Erdogan et al. (2018, 2020) and Cheng et al. (2019) found that POQ has a significant negative effect on employees' career satisfaction. POQ also reduces work engagement and affective commitment (Lobene & Meade, 2013; Maynard et al., 2006) and increases turnover intention (Lobene et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2017). Overall, existing research has reached relatively consistent conclusions regarding the impact of POQ on work attitudes (Harari et al., 2017).

Work Behaviors. POQ significantly triggers negative work behaviors and negatively affects positive work behaviors. Liu et al. (2015) and Luksyte et al. (2011) found that POQ stimulates counterproductive work behaviors. Cheng et al. (2021b), in a study of frontline service employees, found that POQ has a significant positive (negative) effect on employees' surface (deep) acting, with psychological contract breach playing a partial mediating role and justice sensitivity strengthening this indirect effect. Additionally, POQ significantly negatively affects customer service proactive behavior through the mediating effect of harmonious work passion, with POQ differentiation positively moderating these direct and indirect relationships (Cheng et al., 2021a), representing one of the few studies examining the cross-level boundary effect of POQ team differentiation. Second, POQ triggers work withdrawal, cyber-loafing, time banditry, and pro-organizational unethical behavior (Cheng et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020; Chu & Wang, 2019; Liu & Xi, 2016). Since employees with high POQ believe they deserve better jobs, they engage in more internal and external job search behaviors (Erdogan et al., 2020) and voluntary turnover (Maynard et al., 2013). Furthermore, Xie et al. (2015) found that POQ enhances job alienation, thereby reducing employees' job crafting and other positive behaviors. POQ also damages employees' positive cognition, causing work anger, destroying organizational self-esteem, and increasing job burnout, thereby reducing OCB (Kim et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2017; Huang & Peng, 2017). Nevertheless, the meta-analytic conclusions of Harari et al. (2017) and Yang and Li (2021) regarding

the direct relationship between POQ and OCB are inconsistent.

Job Performance. POQ negatively affects in-role performance and innovative performance. POQ damages employees' self-concept or triggers psychological entitlement, thereby reducing in-role performance (Li et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Zhao et al. (2015) found that employees with high POQ experience psychological contract breach because they believe the organization cannot meet their expectations, thereby reducing innovative behavior. Additionally, Wang (2018), based on a cognitive-emotional dual-process model, found that POQ triggers employees' work anger, thereby reducing creativity. Zhao et al. (2020) and Zhong et al. (2021) showed that POQ weakens employee innovation by negatively affecting work thriving, though the former found that servant leadership and transactional contracts negatively moderate this indirect effect, while the latter found that performance pay can mitigate this indirect effect. Li and Chen (2022) found that POQ significantly negatively affects post-90s employees' innovative behavior through the chain mediation of turnover intention and work involvement. However, some studies have found positive effects of POQ on job performance (see Section 2.4), and existing meta-analyses also indicate that the relationships between POQ and individual task performance and innovative performance are not significant (Harari et al., 2017; Yang & Li, 2021).

Physical and Mental Health. Wassermann and Hoppe (2019), in a study of immigrant workers, found that POQ reduces life satisfaction. Erdogan et al. (2018) found that POQ significantly increases employees' relative deprivation, thereby reducing subjective well-being. Yu et al. (2021), in a study of employees from 12 Chinese enterprises, found that POQ significantly increases individual work alienation, indirectly leading to emotional exhaustion, with this indirect effect being stronger when leader-member exchange quality is high. Maynard et al. (2015) found that POQ enhances career-related stress. In summary, POQ has significant negative effects on various mental health variables (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Harari et al., 2017).

2.4 Research on Positive Effects of Perceived Overqualification

In recent years, a growing body of research has demonstrated that POQ has positive effects on proactive behavior, in-role performance, and innovative performance, prompting academia to adopt a more comprehensive perspective to investigate POQ's positive influences and other more complex effects. For instance, Zhang et al. (2016), based on a self-regulation perspective, found that employees with high POQ can complete work faster and better and perceive themselves as having more resources, thereby developing high role breadth efficacy and enhancing proactive behavior. Deng et al. (2018) found that when individuals have high interpersonal influence, POQ positively affects in-role performance, interpersonal altruism, and group member proactivity through social acceptance. Zhao et al. (2020) found that frontline teachers' POQ can stimulate role breadth efficacy and promote knowledge sharing. Second, Erdogan and

Bauer (2009) argued that individuals with high POQ have more positive self-evaluations, and low performance would be inconsistent with this positive self-image, thus POQ motivates them to improve in-role performance to avoid cognitive dissonance. Hu et al. (2015) confirmed from a relative deprivation perspective that POQ positively affects task performance and OCB through task significance and person-group fit, with team-level colleague POQ mean positively moderating these effects. Zhang et al. (2021) showed that POQ positively affects vitality and task performance through strengths-oriented and interest-oriented job crafting, respectively, with organizational identification positively moderating the mediating effect of interest-oriented job crafting. Lee et al. (2021) argued that POQ has an objective basis, namely that employees possess surplus abilities, skills, and experience, which makes them more proficient at tasks and better able to complete work, resulting in higher in-role performance. Additionally, POQ can promote individual innovative performance by enhancing innovative self-efficacy or work engagement (Wang, 2018; Zhao et al., 2016), and when POQ is highly consistent with person-organization fit, employees exhibit stronger proactive creativity (Wang, 2020). Liu et al. (2021) also found that POQ promotes employee creativity through the mediating effect of boundary-spanning behavior, with team collectivism orientation positively moderating the relationship between POQ and boundary-spanning behavior.

Furthermore, some scholars have investigated the non-linear effects of POQ, suggesting that its impact on employees follows a “too much of a good thing” pattern. For example, Lin et al. (2017), based on a job crafting perspective, found that POQ has an inverted U-shaped effect on employees’ task crafting, which indirectly affects their creativity and OCB. Zhang et al. (2020), based on self-regulation theory, found that POQ has an inverted U-shaped effect on employees’ internal entrepreneurship self-efficacy, which indirectly affects their internal entrepreneurship in an inverted U-shaped pattern. Lin et al. (2022), based on conservation of resources theory, also confirmed that POQ has inverted U-shaped direct and indirect effects on job crafting and creativity. Additionally, Ma et al. (2018), based on face theory, argued that employees experience ability-related face pressure to “gain face” when POQ is low and to avoid “losing face” when POQ is high, empirically testing the U-shaped effect of POQ on employee creativity.

2.5 Review of Existing Research on Perceived Overqualification

(1) Excessive Focus on the Negative Side. Previous research has overemphasized the negative aspects of perceived overqualification (POQ), with insufficient and even unbalanced analysis and discussion of its positive aspects. As mentioned above, although some scholars have begun to focus on POQ’s positive and non-linear effects, such research remains relatively scarce. Currently, POQ’s effects on individual work performance and certain positive work behaviors remain controversial. As shown in meta-analytic studies by Harari et

al. (2017) and Yang and Li (2021), the relationships between POQ and individual innovative performance, task performance, and OCB are not significant. Therefore, further investigation is needed to uncover POQ's positive effects and mechanisms (Van Dijk et al., 2020).

(2) Lack of Team-Level and Cross-Level Analysis. In existing research, only a few studies have examined the cross-level boundary effects of team POQ (Cheng et al., 2021a; Hu et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2019). As organizational environments become increasingly dynamic and complex, work teams have become more prevalent and constitute the most basic organizational unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). It is well known that team outcomes are not simply the sum of individual outcomes, and the effects and mechanisms of POQ at the team level and across levels differ from those at the individual level. Therefore, there is an urgent need to focus on POQ in team contexts and investigate its effects at the team level and across levels (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Li et al., 2021).

(3) Lack of Analysis of Team-Level POQ Composition. Previous research has primarily understood and operationalized team POQ through simple aggregation or averaging of all members' POQ (the composition approach), as seen in studies by Hu et al. (2015) and Ma et al. (2019), with only individual scholars exploring the boundary effects of POQ differentiation on individual POQ effects (Cheng et al., 2021a). As team diversity increases, members' POQ also varies considerably. Aggregation or averaging methods cannot capture the true composition of team POQ, making it difficult to explore how different POQ compositions affect team processes and outcomes. However, combining composition and compilation approaches can comprehensively present and characterize team-level variables, as demonstrated in multiple papers published in top international journals (Ployhart et al., 2006; Shipton et al., 2017; Wee & Taylor, 2018). Therefore, this approach can be borrowed to analyze and discuss POQ in team contexts for a deeper understanding of team overqualification phenomena.

3. Research Proposal

This study aims to analyze and explore the multilevel positive effects of perceived overqualification (POQ) composition in team contexts, comprehensively considering the joint effects of team POQ mean (composition approach) and team POQ differentiation (compilation approach) and their mechanisms. The research consists of three components: First, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, it explores the effects of team POQ composition on team work outcomes; second, based on social identity theory, it further explores the cross-level effects of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes; third, combining expectation states theory and social identity theory, it explores the boundary conditions under which individual POQ positively affects work outcomes in the context of team POQ differentiation (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

3.1 The Positive Effects and Mechanisms of Team POQ Composition on Team Work Outcomes

Research Component One addresses the question: Can and how does the composition of perceived overqualification (POQ) in team contexts positively affect team work outcomes? Team POQ composition includes the team POQ mean, representing the overall team level, and team POQ differentiation, reflecting the dispersion among members. The former reflects the team's human capital stock to some extent, while the latter is a primary factor causing relative deprivation and unfairness among members. How do these two indicators of team POQ composition jointly affect team work outcomes? From a human capital perspective, high team POQ mean should positively affect team work outcomes. However, POQ differentiation causes feelings of injustice—just as the ancient saying goes, “worry not about scarcity but about inequality.” High POQ differentiation may make some members feel more unfairness and even anger, predictably undermining the positive effects of POQ mean. Therefore, this study draws on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework to examine how team POQ composition affects positive team processes and team work outcomes (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]).

(1) The Effect of Team POQ Mean on Positive Team Processes. Team POQ mean reflects the overall level of POQ in a team. From a human capital perspective, the higher the team POQ mean, the more sufficient the collective intellectual capital—skills and experience—available to complete team tasks. Although previous research has mostly argued that individual POQ leads to negative attitudes and behavioral reactions, few studies have explored the potential positive effects of team POQ mean on overall team morale and behavioral responses. Nevertheless, we can find some positive evidence in existing literature. For example, Hu et al. (2015) found that team-level colleague POQ mean can rationalize individual POQ and positively moderate its positive effects on task significance and person-group fit, ultimately benefiting individual performance. Ma et al. (2019) also found that team POQ mean can mitigate or even reverse the negative effects of individual POQ. Compared to teams with low POQ mean, members in teams with high POQ mean are more likely to believe they are part of an “elite group.” Moreover, individuals in teams where colleagues generally have high POQ may subconsciously elevate their judgments of their own job importance and status, which greatly benefits their identification with or recognition of their team identity. When employees believe their team is an “elite team” and that their work is important and valuable, they will invest more actively in team work, share information with other members, and collaborate effectively, ensuring smooth team operations. Therefore, based on social identity theory, this study argues that team POQ mean will positively affect positive team processes.

Hypothesis 1-1: Team POQ mean has a significant positive effect on positive team processes.

(2) The Indirect Effect of Team POQ Mean on Team Work Outcomes.

Although perceived overqualification (POQ) is an individual subjective perception that differs from yet overlaps with objective overqualification, and POQ is also influenced by other factors such as personality traits, performance evaluation, and organizational context, it is generally believed that POQ is mainly caused by objective overqualification (Arvan et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2017; Liu & Wang, 2012). Therefore, for teams with higher POQ mean, their overall human capital stock is also relatively higher. Based on input-output models and human capital advantages, such teams should achieve higher work outcomes. In today's organizations, work teams have become the most basic organizational unit, and effective team task execution requires all members to coordinate and cooperate effectively—that is, to achieve team goals through positive team processes. In teams with high POQ mean, members are more willing to believe that work tasks are important and that they are part of an “elite team,” accepting and identifying with their team. Consequently, they are more willing to form good interactive relationships with other team members. With the support of these positive team processes, teams can achieve higher work outcomes. Therefore, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 1-2: Team POQ mean positively affects team work outcomes, with positive team processes playing a mediating role.

(3) The Moderating Role of Team POQ Differentiation. Although the above arguments posit that team POQ mean enhances positive team processes and team work outcomes, the potential impact of team POQ differentiation cannot be ignored. Team POQ differentiation represents the dispersion of POQ levels among members, with greater differentiation indicating a more polarized POQ landscape. According to self-categorization theory, such differentiation carries the risk of team fragmentation. This theory suggests that the more discrete individual characteristics are among team members, the more likely team faultlines or subgroups will form, threatening team cooperation and coordination (Ployhart et al., 2006). In teams with polarized POQ levels, the higher the POQ mean, the less likely members are to believe this is an “elite team” and the more likely they are to view it as a “mixed bag,” potentially even creating a “contempt chain” among members (Li et al., 2021), which seriously threatens positive team processes and outcomes. Conversely, when members' POQ levels show small differences, higher team POQ mean better reflects “elite team” characteristics, enabling members to develop identity and benefiting positive team processes and outcomes (Hu et al., 2015). Additionally, Hu et al. (2015) noted that calculating the mean of other members' POQ in a team (excluding the target individual) can better represent team-level colleague POQ and found that colleague POQ mean positively moderates the indirect positive effect of individual POQ on individual performance. This suggests that an individual's objective overqualification can trigger both self-POQ and be observed by colleagues. Based on this, it is reasonable to infer that team POQ differentiation can reflect POQ differences in the team and the underlying differences in objec-

tive overqualification levels.

Hypothesis 1-3: Team POQ differentiation negatively moderates the relationship between team POQ mean and positive team processes, as well as the indirect effect on team work outcomes through positive team processes. Specifically, these direct and indirect relationships are stronger under low POQ differentiation and weaker under high POQ differentiation.

3.2 Cross-Level Positive Effects and Mechanisms of Team POQ Composition on Individual Work Outcomes

Research Component Two addresses the question: Does the composition of POQ in teams have cross-level positive effects on individual-level work outcomes, and through what mechanisms? This is an issue rarely examined in previous research but urgently called for by many scholars (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Sierra, 2011; Li et al., 2021). Research suggests that when team-level colleague POQ mean is higher, individuals are more likely to believe they are part of an “elite team.” Related research has preliminarily confirmed that colleague POQ mean or team POQ mean can rationalize individual POQ and strengthen its positive effects (Hu et al., 2015) or weaken its negative effects (Ma et al., 2019). Therefore, this study draws on social identity theory to examine the cross-level effects of team POQ composition on individual team identification and work outcomes (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]).

(1) Cross-Level Relationship Between Team POQ Mean and Individual Team Identification. Although existing POQ research has not yet involved cross-level effects, some studies have examined cross-level moderating effects of team-level POQ constructs. Hu et al. (2015) found that team-level colleague POQ mean positively moderates the indirect positive effect of individual POQ on individual performance through the dual mediation of task significance and person-group fit. Ma et al. (2019) showed that although individual POQ weakens OCB by negatively affecting insider status perception, this indirect negative effect is reversed to an indirect positive effect when team POQ is high. Thus, when overqualified individuals work with colleagues of comparable qualifications, they not only avoid experiencing negative psychological states and reducing positive work behaviors but may even take pride in their high-qualification team. As mentioned above, compared to teams with low or insufficient POQ mean, members in teams with high POQ mean are more likely to consider themselves part of an “elite group.” Moreover, individuals in teams where colleagues generally have high POQ may subconsciously elevate their judgments of their own job importance and status, which greatly benefits their identification with or recognition of their team identity. Therefore, based on social identity theory, this study argues that team POQ mean has a cross-level positive effect on individual team identification.

Hypothesis 2-1: Team POQ mean has a cross-level positive effect on individual team identification.

(2) Cross-Level Indirect Effect of Team POQ Mean on Individual Work Outcomes. The above arguments establish the cross-level positive effect of team POQ mean on individual team identification. Similarly, in teams with high POQ mean, individual members may experience high performance pressure or ability-related face pressure to avoid falling too far behind other members, thereby striving to achieve or maintain ideal work outcomes (Chang et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2018). Furthermore, research indicates that individual members' identification with their team (group) promotes their display of pro-social and pro-organizational behaviors (Tao et al., 2016). Janssen and Huang (2008), based on a study of middle management teams, found that individual members' team identification drives them to engage in more OCB directed at other team members, which in turn mediates the positive relationship between the member's team identification and their individual effectiveness as a team member. In other words, individual team identification positively affects personal effectiveness as a team member. Based on this, this study argues that team POQ mean has a cross-level positive effect on individual work outcomes by enhancing individual members' team (group) identification.

Hypothesis 2-2: Team POQ mean has a cross-level indirect positive effect on individual work outcomes through individual team identification.

(3) Boundary Effect of Team POQ Differentiation. Like its effects at the team level, POQ differentiation may also influence the cross-level effects of team POQ mean. According to self-categorization theory, the more discrete team members' POQ levels are, the more likely team faultlines or subgroups will form, causing individual members to identify more with their subgroups than with the work team. When POQ levels differ greatly among members, even if team POQ mean is high, the presence of members with very low POQ prevents those with high POQ from viewing the team as an "elite team" and may even lead them to see it as a "mixed bag." Moreover, high POQ differentiation may create a "contempt chain" in the team, damaging low-POQ members' identification with the team. For example, Li et al. (2021) found that overqualified individuals experience both contempt and envy when facing colleagues they perceive as much less qualified, leading them to hide knowledge from such colleagues. In summary, large POQ differentiation may weaken the cross-level effects of POQ mean on individual members' team identification and work outcomes. Conversely, in teams where members' POQ levels show small differences, higher POQ mean is more likely to be perceived as an "elite team," generating high team identity and ultimately driving high work outcomes.

Hypothesis 2-3: Team POQ differentiation negatively moderates the cross-level relationship between team POQ mean and individual team identification, as well as the cross-level indirect effect on individual work outcomes through team identification. Specifically, these direct and indirect cross-level relationships are stronger under low POQ differentiation and weaker under high POQ differentiation.

3.3 Positive Effects of Individual POQ on Individual Work Outcomes Under Team POQ Differentiation

Research Component Three addresses the question: Individual POQ embodies human capital advantages, but can it positively affect work outcomes? The vast majority of existing research examines the negative effects of POQ on individuals, yet meta-analytic results show that the relationship between POQ and job performance is not significant (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). In today's organizations, overqualification is widespread (Zheng et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021), and if POQ only produced negative consequences, this would contradict reality. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply explore the potential positive effects of POQ and their pathways. Second, what contextual role does team-level POQ composition play in these positive effects? Previous research has found that team-level POQ can rationalize individual-level POQ and weaken its negative effects or strengthen its positive effects. Therefore, exploring the boundary conditions of individual POQ's potential positive effects is also important. Research Component Two examined the cross-level influence mechanism of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes through team (group) identification. In some team-related research, status and team identification are two closely related elements. For example, Mitchell et al. (2015) argued that both status and team identification play mediating roles in the process through which inclusive leadership affects team performance, and Liao et al. (2012) emphasized the joint role of status and team identification when exploring the development of team transactive memory systems from a social identity perspective. When exploring POQ issues in team contexts, deeper experiences arising from social comparison and team interaction also involve issues of team identification and status within the team. Therefore, we further examine the potential role of individual status within teams. Given the subjective nature of POQ and its potential lack of formal organizational recognition, this study examines the mediating role of informal (team) status between individual POQ and work outcomes. Accordingly, this study draws on expectation states theory to examine the positive effects of individual POQ, its pathways, and the boundary effects of team POQ differentiation (see Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper]).

(1) The Effect of Individual POQ on Informal (Team) Status. As mentioned earlier, previous research on POQ effects has primarily focused on the individual level, examining the negative psychological experiences and passive behavioral reactions triggered by employees' perceptions of their own overqualification. This research paradigm, resembling a "disappointed individual lamenting alone," rarely considers the role that other team members might play in this process. Obviously, how other team members view a focal employee's overqualification likely influences that employee's behavioral responses. According to expectation states theory, given that overqualified employees possess surplus qualifications in knowledge, skills, and abilities, these individuals are likely to be viewed by other team members as more capable, as pillars of the team, and thus gain higher prominence, respect, and esteem in their eyes—that is, they are

granted higher informal (team) status (Anderson et al., 2001; Van Dijk et al., 2020). Achieving high informal status in a team can satisfy some psychological needs and bring more resources, including greater cooperation from other members, becoming an informal information network hub or channel, and becoming an opinion leader. Related research shows that individual informal status positively affects creative output (Liu et al., 2015) and proactive change behavior (Deng & Liu, 2021). Based on this, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 3-1: Individual POQ has a significant positive effect on individual informal (team) status.

(2) The Indirect Effect of Individual POQ on Individual Work Outcomes. Regarding the relationship between individual POQ and individual work outcomes, although most existing research explores POQ's negative effects on individual attitudes and behaviors, meta-analyses show that the relationships between POQ and individual performance (innovation, task) and OCB are not significant (Harari et al., 2017; Yang & Li, 2021). Consequently, some scholars have begun exploring the indirect positive effects of POQ on individual outcomes. For example, Hu et al. (2015) examined the positive effects of employees' POQ on in-role performance and OCB through the dual mediation of task significance and person-group fit, and the positive moderating effect of colleague POQ mean on these dual mediation effects, finding that the moderating effect was significant and that the dual mediation effects remained significant even when colleague POQ mean was low. Additionally, Zhang et al. (2016) explored the positive effect of POQ on individual proactive behavior through role breadth self-efficacy, with individual goal orientation moderating both stages of this mediation. Lin et al. (2017) found that POQ has an inverted U-shaped effect on individual job crafting, which indirectly affects creativity and OCB. Zhang et al. (2020) examined the inverted U-shaped effect of POQ on employees' internal entrepreneurship from a self-regulation perspective. Based on expectation states theory, after individuals obtain high informal (team) status through their POQ, they possess more advantages and resources to achieve high work outcomes on one hand, and on the other hand, high-status individuals adjust their behavior according to others' expectations to maintain this high informal (team) status advantage, thereby achieving high work outcomes to gain others' approval. Based on this, this study argues that individual POQ positively affects individual work outcomes, with individual informal (team) status playing a positive mediating role.

Hypothesis 3-2: Individual POQ has a positive effect on individual work outcomes, with individual informal (team) status playing a positive mediating role.

(3) Cross-Level Boundary Effect of Team POQ Differentiation. This study argues that the above direct and indirect effects of individual POQ may also be influenced by team POQ conditions. However, unlike previous research focusing on the boundary effects of team-level colleague POQ mean (Hu et al., 2015) or team POQ mean (Ma et al., 2019), this study focuses on the bound-

ary effect of team POQ differentiation. The reason is that individual informal (team) status reflects status differences among team members, and such status differences are precisely obtained by individuals through their POQ under conditions of POQ differentiation, regardless of team POQ mean level. In teams with extremely low POQ differentiation, the informal status differences that individual POQ can bring are small—that is, all members obtain similar status advantages through their POQ. As POQ differentiation increases, the status differences that individual POQ can bring also increase. However, according to optimal differentiation theory, it is understandable that the moderating effect of team POQ differentiation on the relationship between individual POQ and informal (team) status is not fixed. When POQ differentiation increases to a certain extent, the marginal effect of individual POQ on informal (team) status may decrease. Based on this, this study argues that team POQ differentiation has an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the relationship between individual POQ and individual informal (team) status, and consequently an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the relationship between individual POQ and individual work outcomes.

Hypothesis 3-3: Team POQ differentiation has an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the relationship between individual POQ and informal status, and consequently an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the indirect relationship between POQ and individual work outcomes through informal status. Specifically, these direct and indirect relationships are strongest under moderate POQ differentiation and weaker under low or high POQ differentiation.

4. Theoretical Contribution

Based on the social reality that overqualification is widespread in various organizations and the current state of POQ research that primarily focuses on negative effects at the individual level while paying insufficient attention to potential positive effects and rarely exploring multilevel effects at the team level, this study focuses on the potential positive effects of POQ in team contexts. It comprehensively considers the joint effects of two key dimensions of team-level POQ composition (team mean and team differentiation) and analyzes their multilevel effects on team-level and individual-level work outcomes and underlying mechanisms. The theoretical contributions of this study include:

First, this study introduces team differentiation research into the POQ domain and integrates composition and compilation approaches to provide a more comprehensive analysis and discussion of POQ in team contexts, thereby revealing the multilevel effects of team POQ composition on team and individual work outcomes. The composition approach defines team POQ using sample means, which cannot fully reflect team POQ composition. The compilation approach uses sample standard deviation to measure POQ dispersion in teams, compensating for the limitations of the composition approach. Previous research has understood and operationalized team POQ through simple aggregation or averaging (composition approach) while neglecting team POQ differentiation (compilation

approach). Obviously, linear methods such as aggregation or averaging cannot capture the true composition of team POQ, making it difficult to effectively explore how different POQ compositions affect team processes and outcomes and individual members. Self-categorization theory suggests that the more discrete individual characteristics are in a team, the more likely team faultlines or subteams will form, damaging overall unity and coordination. Therefore, between two teams with equal POQ means, the team with lower POQ differentiation may perform better in various aspects. Thus, integrating composition and compilation approaches enables a deeper understanding of overqualification in teams.

Second, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, this study explores the multilevel effects and mechanisms of POQ composition in team contexts on team and individual work outcomes. First, existing literature has primarily focused on POQ at the individual level, with scarce research on team-level POQ effects. Nowadays, as organizational environments become increasingly dynamic and complex, work teams have become more prevalent and constitute the most basic work unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). Second, as the ancient saying goes, “worry not about scarcity but about inequality,” team-level POQ differs from individual POQ. The proportion of overqualified members in a team and the POQ levels of various members affect not only the individual level but also team processes and outcomes. To more deeply understand POQ in team contexts, identify its differences and connections with individual POQ, and more comprehensively understand this phenomenon, it is urgent to focus on team POQ and explore its effects on team processes and outcomes. Therefore, this study, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, comprehensively examines the joint effects of team POQ mean and differentiation on positive team processes and team work outcomes, aiming to fill the gap in existing POQ research at the team level and provide management insights for teams with POQ phenomena.

Second, based on social identity theory, this study further explores the cross-level positive effects of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes, extending individuals’ psychological experiences and behavioral responses from their own POQ to their experiences and reactions to team POQ conditions, and more deeply analyzing the effects of team POQ composition. This also responds to scholars’ calls for examining cross-level POQ effects (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Sierra, 2011; Li et al., 2021). Existing research has rarely involved cross-level POQ effects, with only a few studies examining the moderating effects of colleague POQ mean (Hu et al., 2015) and team POQ mean (Ma et al., 2019) on individual POQ effects. Individuals not only perceive and react to their own overqualification but also notice and react to other team members’ overqualification. Existing research has found that colleague POQ mean or team POQ mean can rationalize individual POQ and strengthen its positive effects or weaken its negative effects (Hu et al., 2015; Ma et al., 2019). Therefore, this study, based on social identity theory and with individual team identification as a mediator, further examines the cross-level influence mechanism of team POQ

composition on individual work outcomes, thereby deepening understanding of POQ effects in team contexts.

Third, based on expectation states theory, this study explores the boundary conditions under which individual POQ exerts positive effects in the context of team POQ differentiation. Currently, academic research on the negative effects of individual POQ is quite extensive, but exploration of its potential positive effects remains relatively scarce. Some scholars have suggested adopting new theoretical perspectives to more broadly explore positive effects of POQ at the individual level (Van Dijk et al., 2020). While overqualification may frustrate employees, it may also bring them higher informal (team) status, making them opinion leaders in others' eyes. Therefore, this study, from the perspective of expectation states theory and with informal status as a mediator, examines the potential positive influence of individual POQ, thereby enriching research on positive POQ effects at the individual level. First, based on expectation states theory, it examines the positive effect of individual POQ on work outcomes through informal status advantages—highly qualified individuals are likely to be granted higher status by other members, that is, higher prominence, respect, and esteem in others' eyes, making them more advantaged than low-status individuals in achieving high work outcomes (Van Dijk et al., 2020). Second, it examines the boundary effect of team POQ differentiation on the above influence. Thus, this study not only extends research on individual POQ effects and mechanisms but also enriches research on the boundary effects of team POQ composition.

The practical contributions of this study are as follows: (1) Analyzing and discussing the positive effects of POQ in team contexts can effectively resolve the “talent acquisition and development paradox” and help organizations achieve “appropriate talent utilization.” Previous POQ research has concentrated on negative effects, which to some extent contradicts the human capital advantages emphasized by academia and industry—the “talent acquisition and development paradox.” If POQ were purely harmful, it would also contradict the increasingly fierce “talent wars” across regions in China. Therefore, this study's findings can help organizations more comprehensively understand employee overqualification and provide important reference for the “acquisition, development, and utilization” of highly qualified talent. (2) Comprehensively examining the joint effects of team POQ mean level and differentiation degree can provide practical guidance for organizations to more effectively form work teams, assign overqualified employees, and improve team management. Team POQ mean and differentiation are two key dimensions for comprehensively understanding and characterizing POQ composition in team contexts, and they have different unilateral effects on team processes and outcomes, but their influences are intertwined. By comprehensively examining the joint effects of team POQ mean and differentiation, fully exploring their effects and mechanisms, this study can provide valuable guidance for organizations to more effectively manage employee overqualification in teams.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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