

The Positive Effects of Perceived Overqualification in Team Contexts: An Integrative Perspective from Compositional and Compilational Approaches Postprint

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Abstract

Perceived overqualification refers to the subjective feeling of individuals that their qualifications exceed the actual requirements of their jobs. In various organizations today, the phenomenon of overqualification is widespread, and the effects of perceived overqualification have received extensive attention from scholars both domestically and internationally. However, previous research has primarily focused on examining the negative effects of perceived overqualification at the individual level, while the exploration of its potential positive effects has been somewhat insufficient, and attention to team-level perceived overqualification has been neglected. To this end, this paper will integrate compositional and compilational approaches to analyze and explore the composition of perceived overqualification in team contexts and its effects. The research mainly conducts three aspects: first, to investigate the positive impact of team perceived overqualification composition on team work outcomes; second, to examine the cross-level positive impact of team perceived overqualification composition on individual work outcomes; third, to investigate the variation in the positive impact of individual perceived overqualification on their work outcomes under conditions of team differentiation in perceived overqualification. This paper is expected to extend research on perceived overqualification in team contexts and better guide enterprise management practice.

Full Text

Preamble

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Conceptual Framework

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

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Abstract

Perceived overqualification refers to the subjective feeling that an individual's qualifications exceed the actual requirements of their job. This phenomenon is widespread across various organizations, and its effects have attracted considerable scholarly attention both domestically and internationally. However, previous research has predominantly focused on the negative effects of perceived overqualification at the individual level, with insufficient exploration of its potential positive effects and limited attention to team-level perceived overqualification. This paper integrates composition and compilation approaches to analyze and explore the composition and effects of perceived overqualification in team contexts. The research comprises three main components: First, investigating the positive impact of team-level perceived overqualification composition on team work outcomes; second, examining the cross-level positive influence of team perceived overqualification composition on individual work outcomes; and third, exploring how individual perceived overqualification affects individual work outcomes under conditions of team differentiation in perceived overqualification. This study aims to extend research on perceived overqualification in team contexts and provide better guidance for organizational management practice.

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

Classification Code: B849: C93

Introduction

In recent years, the topic of “highly educated but underemployed” 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 the labor force with higher education has risen steadily. In this context, the employment situation for recent graduates, especially from non-key universities, has become increasingly severe. As Professor Huang Deng noted, “The situation around 2010 where graduates from a second-tier university in the Pearl River Delta would have two or three job offers upon graduation no longer exists.” Additionally, Zheng et al. (2021) investigated the issue of overeducation in China using sample data 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 substantially lower salaries than they would have in positions matching their qualifications.

In academic research, this phenomenon of “highly educated but underemployed” 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 workers globally believe their qualifications exceed job requirements, while in China this proportion reaches as high as 84% (Lin et al., 2017). However, organizations hold contradictory attitudes toward overqualification. On one hand, they hope to recruit talented individuals to facilitate faster and better development; on the other hand, they worry that overqualified employees may be “dissatisfied with their status quo” and have poor initiative, potentially producing counterproductive results. For instance, a quasi-experimental study on hiring managers published in *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ) found that managers tend to eliminate job candidates whose abilities far exceed job requirements when screening resumes, believing that overqualified candidates have lower employer commitment, are more difficult to motivate by the organization’s mission and goals, and are more likely to leave for other opportunities (Galperin et al., 2020). However, Thompson et al. (2013), in their reflection on underemployment and overqualification in organizations, argued that hiring overqualified candidates would benefit future organizational development and that organizations should and can achieve a win-win situation on this issue.

So, is employee overqualification 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 the latter only triggers psychological experiences and behavioral responses when perceived by the individual. 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 behavioral reactions triggered by POQ (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Chen et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2015; Luksyte et al., 2011; Xie et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2019). Some scholars have also begun exploring the positive effects and non-linear effects of POQ on individuals (Lin et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, existing research remains divided on the impact of POQ on job performance and interpersonal

relationships (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021), and meta-analytic results show that the relationships between POQ and individual task performance, innovation, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) are not significant (Harari et al., 2017; Yang & Li, 2021). Consequently, scholars have suggested that further research should explore the potential positive effects of POQ on work outcomes and their mechanisms (Li et al., 2021; van Dijk et al., 2020).

Moreover, existing research has rarely explored the effects of POQ at the team level and cross-level effects. Nowadays, as the internal and external organizational environment becomes increasingly dynamic and complex, teams have become more prevalent in organizations and serve as the most basic work unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). Therefore, scholars have called for strengthened cross-level research on POQ (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Sierra, 2011). Unlike individual POQ, which tends to trigger negative psychological experiences, team-level POQ may have positive effects on member interactions or actions. For example, Hu et al. (2015) confirmed that colleague POQ at the team level positively moderates the indirect positive effect of individual POQ on individual performance. Ma et al. (2019) found that team POQ mean can mitigate or even reverse the negative effects of individual POQ. Second, previous studies' understanding and operationalization of team POQ have mostly been based on simple summation or averaging of all members' POQ, ignoring team differentiation in POQ (measured by standard deviation), with only a few scholars making efforts in this regard (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 members' POQ, members in team A are more likely to view the team as a whole, thereby enhancing mutual collaboration and communication and benefiting team output. In contrast, members in team B are likely to form team faultlines or subgroups due to POQ team differentiation, hindering mutual interaction and ultimately harming team output. Based on this, 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 paper integrates composition approach (team mean) and compilation approach (team differentiation) to analyze and explore the composition of POQ in team contexts and its potential positive effects. The research focuses on three aspects: First, examining the positive impact of team POQ composition on team work output; second, investigating the cross-level positive influence of team POQ composition on individual work output; and third, exploring the differential effects of individual POQ on work output under conditions of team POQ differentiation. This paper aims to construct a multi-level theoretical model of POQ effects in team contexts, with the goal of uncovering the potential positive effects of POQ in team settings, expanding academic research on POQ, and providing reference for organizational management practice.

Literature Review

The Connotation, Measurement, and Current Research Status of Perceived Overqualification

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, knowledge, and skills exceed the actual requirements of their job (Maynard et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2020). As research has evolved, the distinction between objective overqualification and perceived overqualification (POQ) has emerged. The former is measured primarily 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 on objective overqualification has two main weaknesses: (1) It is difficult to effectively measure surplus in subjective knowledge, experience, and skills, and previous research has mainly focused on measuring overeducation as an objective component (Arvan et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2017), a practice that many scholars consider one-sided (Maltarich et al., 2011); (2) Objective overqualification only triggers subsequent psychological experiences and behavioral reactions when perceived by the individual, meaning that POQ is a more proximal factor affecting individual attitudes and behaviors (Lin et al., 2017; Liu & Wang, 2012). Therefore, relevant research in the OBHRM field primarily focuses on the effects of POQ (Liu & Wang, 2012; Zhang et al., 2016).

Regarding the measurement of POQ, various instruments exist in academia. Early POQ scales included two dimensions: perceived mismatch and perceived lack of development (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Fine and Nevo (2008) expanded the connotation of POQ and adapted a 9-item cognitive perceived overqualification questionnaire (PCOQ) targeting individual cognitive abilities, including cognitive mismatch and cognitive lack of development dimensions, but few subsequent studies have adopted this measure. However, as research has progressed, an increasing number of scholars consider POQ a unidimensional construct, and many studies have shown that lack of development and perceived mismatch have significant discriminant validity, 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, such as Bolino and Feldman’s (2000) 13-item scale for expatriate workers, which primarily measures feelings of underutilization regarding education, work experience, and abilities; Maynard et al.’s (2006) 9-item scale covering education level, work experience, skills, and abilities, which is currently the most frequently used POQ scale; and Sánchez-Cardona et al.’s (2020) 5-item scale.

Factors Influencing 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, demographic factors: As Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis shows, although gender and age are not significantly related to POQ, education level is significantly positively correlated with POQ ($r = 0.08$), meaning that 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, personality traits: Maynard et al. (2015), Lobene et al. (2015), and Cheng (2020) all found that narcissism or its dimensions are significantly positively correlated with POQ, while Debus et al. (2020) found that negative affectivity is negatively correlated with POQ. Third, workplace relationships: Alfes et al. (2016) found that LMX quality and team cohesion are significantly negatively correlated with POQ. Fourth, job characteristics: Lobene et al. (2015) found that uniform dress requirements and repetitive tasks at work strongly predict POQ, while Cheng (2020) found that job control significantly positively affects POQ. Fifth, objective overqualification: 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 ($r = 0.40$).

Research on the Negative Effects of Perceived Overqualification POQ's Negative Impact on Cognitive Feelings and Emotional Experiences. POQ negatively affects employees' cognitive feelings about the organization and work. First, the mismatch and unfairness brought by POQ reduce employees' perceived organizational support and insider status (Li et al., 2019; Zhao et al., 2018) and increase their job insecurity (Peiro 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 sense of achievement, control, and autonomy (Simon et al., 2019; Zhao & Peng, 2020). POQ also reduces employees' recognition of work value and creates work alienation (Xie et al., 2015). Finally, POQ causes employees to question their abilities and value, thereby reducing organization-based self-esteem and core self-evaluation (Cheng et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2015). POQ also makes employees highly confident in their abilities and generates more superiority, thereby increasing psychological privilege (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' psychological contract

breach experience. Zhang et al. (2021) confirmed that the person-job mismatch caused by POQ generates anger toward 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 caused by POQ reduces employees' harmonious passion. Additionally, Zhao et al. (2019), from a resource conservation perspective, confirmed that POQ triggers negative emotions, reduces positive emotions, and intensifies resource loss, thereby increasing employees' emotional exhaustion.

POQ's Negative Impact on Work Attitudes, Behaviors, Performance, and Physical and Mental Health. First, 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 impact on employees' career satisfaction. POQ also reduces employees' job 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 about POQ's impact on work attitudes (Harari et al., 2017). Second, 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 employees' 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 the indirect effect. Additionally, POQ significantly negatively affects customer service proactive behavior through the mediating effect of harmonious work passion, and POQ difference positively moderates the direct and indirect relationships (Cheng et al., 2021a)—this is one of the few studies examining the cross-level boundary effect of POQ team differentiation. Furthermore, POQ triggers individual work withdrawal, cyberloafing, time banditry, and pro-organizational unethical behavior (Cheng et al., 2020; Chu & Wang, 2019; Liu & Xi, 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). Because employees with high POQ believe they deserve a better job, their internal and external job search behaviors (Erdogan et al., 2020) and voluntary turnover behavior (Maynard et al., 2013) increase. Xie et al. (2015) found that POQ enhances work alienation and reduces positive behaviors such as job crafting. POQ also damages employees' positive cognition, leading to work anger, destroying their organization-based self-esteem, increasing job burnout, and thereby reducing OCB (Chen et al., 2017; Huang & Peng, 2017; Kim et al., 2019). Nevertheless, Harari et al. (2017) and Yang and Li (2021) reached inconsistent conclusions about the direct relationship between POQ and OCB in their meta-analyses. Third, job performance: POQ negatively affects employees' in-role performance and innovative performance. POQ damages employees' self-concept or triggers their psychological privilege, 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 violation 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 stimulates employees' work anger, thereby reducing their creativity. Zhao et al. (2020) and Zhong et al. (2021) found that POQ reduces employee innovation by negatively affecting work thriving, though the former found that servant leadership and task-based 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 job involvement. However, some studies have also found positive effects of POQ on job performance (see section 2.4 below), and existing meta-analyses show that the relationship between POQ and individual task performance and innovative performance is not significant (Harari et al., 2017; Yang & Li, 2021). Fourth, physical and mental health: Wassermann and Hoppe (2019), in a study of immigrant workers, found that POQ reduces their life satisfaction. Erdogan et al. (2018) found that POQ significantly increases employees' relative deprivation, thereby reducing their subjective well-being. Yu et al. (2021), in a study of employees from 12 Chinese enterprises, found that POQ significantly increases individuals' work alienation and indirectly leads to emotional exhaustion, with this indirect effect being stronger when leader-member exchange quality is high. Maynard et al. (2015) found that POQ enhances employees' career-related stress. In summary, POQ has significant negative effects on various mental health variables (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Harari et al., 2017).

Research on the Positive Effects of Perceived Overqualification In recent years, some studies have successively shown that POQ has positive effects on proactive behavior, in-role performance, and innovative performance, and the academic community has begun to explore POQ's positive effects and other more complex effects from a more comprehensive perspective. For example, Zhang et al. (2016), based on a self-regulation perspective, found that employees with high POQ can complete work faster and better and believe they have more resources, thereby generating high role breadth efficacy and enhancing their proactive behavior. Deng et al. (2016) found that when individuals have high interpersonal influence, POQ has a positive effect on 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 their 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, so POQ motivates them to improve in-role performance to avoid cognitive dissonance. Hu et al. (2015) confirmed from a relative exploitation perspective that POQ positively affects task performance and OCB through task importance 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 strength-oriented and interest-oriented job crafting, respectively, with organizational identity positively moderating the mediating effect of interest-oriented job crafting. Lee et al. (2021) argued that POQ has an objective basis, as employees possess surplus abilities, skills, and experience, which makes them more proficient in 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 there is high-level consistency between POQ and person-organization fit, employees' proactive creativity is stronger (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 explored the non-linear effects of POQ, suggesting that POQ has a "too much of a good thing" effect on employees. 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 and 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 and indirectly has an inverted U-shaped effect on their internal entrepreneurship. Lin et al. (2022), based on resource conservation 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 face pressure to "gain face" when POQ is low and to avoid "losing face" when POQ is high, and empirically tested the U-shaped effect of POQ on employee creativity.

Review of Existing Research on Perceived Overqualification First, previous research has overly focused on the negative aspects of perceived overqualification (POQ), with insufficient and even unbalanced analysis and exploration of its positive aspects. As mentioned above, although some scholars have begun to pay attention to the positive effects and non-linear effects of POQ, research in this area is still relatively scarce. Currently, there are still many disagreements about the impact of POQ on individual job performance and certain positive work behaviors. As shown in meta-analyses 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 research is needed to explore the potential positive effects of POQ on work outcomes and their mechanisms (Li et al., 2021; van Dijk et al., 2020).

Second, there is a lack of analysis and exploration of team-level and cross-level effects. 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 the internal and external organizational environment becomes increasingly dynamic and complex, work teams have become more prevalent in organizations and serve as the most basic organizational unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). As the saying goes, “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” the overall situation of POQ at the team level is obviously different from individual POQ. The proportion of overqualified members in a team and the level of POQ among various members not only play a role at the individual level but also affect team processes and outcomes. To gain a deeper understanding of POQ in team contexts, identify its differences and connections with individual POQ, and thereby achieve a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the POQ phenomenon, it is urgent to focus on POQ in team contexts and explore its effects at the team level and cross-level effects (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Li et al., 2021).

Third, there is a lack of analysis and exploration of team-level POQ composition. Previous studies’ understanding and operationalization of team POQ have mostly been based on simple summation or averaging of all members’ POQ, such as in the studies by Hu et al. (2015) and Ma et al. (2019), with only a few scholars exploring the boundary effects of POQ differences on individual POQ effects (Cheng et al., 2021a). As team diversity increases, there are also large differences in POQ among members. It is difficult to capture the true picture of team POQ composition through summation or averaging methods, and even more difficult to explore the impact of team POQ composition on team operations and outcomes. However, combining composition and compilation approaches can comprehensively present and depict team-level variables, and many academic papers using such methods have been published in authoritative international journals (Ployhart et al., 2006; Shipton et al., 2017; Wee & Taylor, 2018). Therefore, this method can be borrowed to analyze and explore POQ in team contexts for a deeper understanding of the team overqualification phenomenon.

Research Framework

This study aims to analyze and explore the multi-level positive effects of perceived overqualification (POQ) composition in team contexts, comprehensively considering the joint effects of two important standard dimensions of team-level POQ composition (team mean and team differentiation) and analyzing their multi-level impacts and mechanisms on team and individual work outcomes. The theoretical construction of this paper mainly includes the following content:

First, this paper introduces team differentiation research into the field of perceived overqualification (POQ), integrating composition and compilation approaches to conduct a more three-dimensional analysis and exploration of POQ in team contexts, thereby revealing the multi-level effects of team POQ composition on team and individual work outcomes. The composition approach uses sample means to define team POQ, but this perspective cannot comprehensively

reflect the composition of POQ in teams. The compilation approach uses sample standard deviations to measure the dispersion of POQ in teams, which can compensate for the shortcomings of defining team POQ through the composition approach. Previous research has understood and operationalized team POQ based on simple summation or averaging of all members' POQ (composition approach), while ignoring team differentiation in POQ (compilation approach). Obviously, it is difficult to capture the true picture of team POQ composition through linear methods such as summation or averaging, making it difficult to effectively explore the different composition situations of POQ and their differential impacts on team operations and outcomes, as well as on individual members. Self-categorization theory suggests that the more discrete individual characteristics are in a team, the easier it is to form team faultlines or subteams, which damages overall unity and coordination. Therefore, in two teams with equal POQ means, teams with smaller POQ differentiation may perform better in various aspects. Thus, integrating composition and compilation approaches can provide a deeper understanding and comprehension of overqualification in teams.

Second, based on social identity theory and the input-process-output (I-P-O) model framework, this paper explores the multi-level effects and mechanisms of POQ composition in team contexts on team and individual work outcomes. First, existing literature on POQ has mainly focused on the individual level, with few studies exploring the effects of team-level POQ. Nowadays, as the organizational environment becomes increasingly dynamic and complex, work teams have become more prevalent in organizations and serve as the most basic work unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). As the saying goes, "worry not about scarcity but about inequality," the overall situation of POQ at the team level is obviously different from individual POQ. The proportion of overqualified members in a team and the level of POQ among members not only play a role at the individual level but also affect team processes and outcomes. To gain a deeper understanding of POQ in team contexts, identify its differences and connections with individual POQ, and thereby achieve a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the POQ phenomenon, it is urgent to focus on team POQ and explore its effects on team processes and outcomes. Therefore, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, this paper comprehensively examines the joint effects of team mean and team differentiation of POQ in team contexts on team positive processes and team work outcomes, aiming to compensate for the shortcomings of existing POQ research at the team level and provide management references for teams with POQ phenomena.

Second, based on social identity theory, this paper further explores the cross-level positive effects of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes, extending individuals' psychological experiences and behavioral responses to their own POQ to their experiences and reactions to team POQ conditions, and more deeply analyzing the effects of team POQ composition, while also responding to scholars' calls to examine cross-level effects of POQ in context (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Sierra, 2011). Existing research has

rarely involved cross-level effects of POQ, with only a few studies examining the boundary effects of colleague POQ mean (Hu et al., 2015) or team POQ mean (Ma et al., 2019) on individual POQ effects. Individuals not only perceive and react to their own overqualification but also perceive 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, based on social identity theory and with individual team identity as a mediator, this paper 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 paper explores the differential positive effects of individual POQ on work output under conditions of team POQ differentiation. Currently, academic research on the negative effects of individual POQ is quite rich, but exploration of its potential positive effects is still relatively scarce. Some scholars have proposed that new theoretical perspectives should be adopted to more broadly explore the positive effects of individual-level POQ (van Dijk et al., 2020). The state of overqualification may make individual employees feel frustrated, but it may also bring them higher informal (team) status, making them opinion leaders in the eyes of others. Therefore, from the perspective of expectation states theory and with individual informal status as a mediator, this paper examines the positive effects and pathways of individual POQ, as well as the boundary effects of team POQ differentiation.

The Positive Effects and Mechanisms of Team Perceived Overqualification 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 team POQ mean representing the overall team level and team POQ differentiation reflecting the degree of dispersion within the team. The former reflects the team's human capital stock to some extent, while the latter is the main factor causing relative deprivation and unfairness among members. So how do these two team POQ composition indicators jointly affect team work outcomes? From the perspective of human capital stock, it is not difficult to understand that high team POQ mean can positively affect team work outcomes, but POQ differentiation leads to feelings of injustice. As the saying goes, "worry not about scarcity but about inequality," high POQ differentiation makes some members feel more unfair and even angry, which can be expected to have destructive consequences for the positive effects of POQ mean. Therefore, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, this paper examines the effects of team POQ composition on positive team processes and team work outcomes (see Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

Team POQ Mean's Effect on Positive Team Processes.

mean reflects the overall level of POQ in the team. From a human capital stock perspective, the higher the team POQ mean, the more sufficient the collective intellectual capital of skills and experience needed to complete team tasks. Although previous research has mostly believed that individual POQ leads to negative attitudes and behavioral reactions, few studies have explored the possible effects of team POQ mean on overall team morale and behavioral reactions. However, we can still 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 the positive effects of individual POQ on task importance and person-group fit, ultimately positively affecting individual performance. Ma et al. (2019) also found that team POQ mean can mitigate or even reverse the negative effects of individual POQ. Compared with teams with low POQ mean, members in teams with high POQ mean are more likely to believe they are part of an “elite group.” Second, when working with colleagues who are generally highly overqualified, individuals are more likely to subconsciously elevate their judgment of their own work importance and self-status, which greatly benefits individual identification with or recognition of their team identity. When employees believe their team is an “elite team” and that the work they do is important and valuable, they will more actively invest themselves in team work, share information with other team members, collaborate effectively, and cooperate, thereby ensuring orderly team operations. Therefore, based on social identity theory, this paper argues that team POQ mean will have a positive effect on positive team processes.

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

The Indirect Effect of Team POQ Mean on Team Work Outcomes.

Although perceived overqualification (POQ) is an individual’s subjective perception that is clearly different from but overlaps with objective overqualification, and POQ is also influenced by other factors such as personality traits, performance evaluation, and organizational context, POQ is generally considered to be 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 relatively higher. Combining the input-output model and human capital advantage perspective, such teams can achieve higher work outcomes. In today’s organizations, work teams have become the most basic organizational unit, and effective execution of team tasks 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,” accept and identify with their team, and are therefore 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 paper proposes the following hypothesis:

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

The Moderating Role of Team POQ Differentiation. Although the above discussion addresses the enhancing effects of team POQ mean on 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—the greater the differentiation, the more polarized the POQ levels among team members. According to self-categorization theory, this differentiation carries the risk of causing team division. The theory posits that the more discrete individual characteristics are among team members, the easier it is to form team faultlines or subgroups, thereby threatening member cooperation and coordination (Ployhart et al., 2006). In teams with polarized POQ levels, the higher the POQ mean, the more difficult it is for members to believe this is an “elite team.” Instead, they are more likely to view it as a “mixed bag” group, even leading to the emergence of a “contempt chain” among members (Li et al., 2022), which seriously threatens positive team processes and team outcomes. Conversely, when team members’ POQ levels have small differences, the higher the team POQ mean, the more it reflects the characteristics of an “elite team,” enabling each member to develop identity identification, which benefits positive team processes and team work outcomes (Hu et al., 2015). Additionally, Hu et al. (2015) pointed out that calculating the mean of POQ for team members other than 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. It is evident that a specific individual’s objective overqualification can both trigger their self-POQ and be observed by surrounding colleagues. Based on this, it is not difficult to infer that team POQ differentiation can reflect POQ differences among team members and the underlying differences in objective 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 of team POQ mean on team work outcomes through positive team processes. Specifically, these direct and indirect relationships are stronger under conditions of low POQ differentiation and weaker under conditions of high POQ differentiation.

Cross-Level Positive Effects and Mechanisms of Team Perceived Overqualification 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? What are the mechanisms through which these effects occur? This is an issue that previous research has rarely addressed but that many scholars have called for urgent investigation (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Sierra, 2011). Research indicates that the higher the mean level of colleague POQ at the

team level, the more individuals tend to believe they are part of an “elite team.” Related research has also preliminarily confirmed 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 paper examines the cross-level effects of team POQ composition on individual team identification and work outcomes from the perspective of social identity theory (see Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]).

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 can positively moderate the indirect positive effect of individual POQ on individual performance through the dual mediation of task importance 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. As mentioned above, compared with teams with low POQ mean, members in teams with high POQ mean are more likely to believe they are part of an “elite group.” Second, when working with colleagues who are generally highly overqualified, individuals are more likely to subconsciously elevate their judgment of their own work importance and self-status, which greatly benefits individual identification with or recognition of their team identity. Therefore, based on social identity theory, this paper argues that team POQ mean can have 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.

Cross-Level Indirect Effect of Team POQ Mean on Individual Work Outcomes. The above discussion addresses 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 face pressure to avoid the embarrassing situation of falling too far behind other members, thereby striving to achieve or maintain ideal work outcomes (Chang et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2018). Additionally, research indicates that individual members’ identification with their team (group) promotes their display of pro-colleague and pro-organization behaviors (Tao et al., 2016). Second, 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, and this OCB directed at other team members mediates the positive relationship between the member’ s team identification and their individual effectiveness as a team member. In other words, individual team identification has a positive effect on their effectiveness as a team member. Based on this, this paper argues that team POQ mean can have a positive cross-level effect on individual work outcomes by enhancing team (group) identification among individual members.

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

Boundary Effect of Team POQ Differentiation. Like its effect at the team level, POQ differentiation may also affect the cross-level effects of team POQ mean. According to self-categorization theory, the more discrete team members' POQ levels are, the easier it is to form team faultlines or subgroups, at which point individual members may be more inclined to identify with their subgroups rather than the work team. When there are large differences in POQ levels among members, even if the team POQ mean is high, the presence of members with very low POQ levels means that members with higher POQ levels will not only fail to view their team as an "elite team" but may even see it as a "mixed bag" group. Second, high POQ differentiation may also lead to a "contempt chain" in the team, thereby damaging team identity among members with lower POQ levels. For example, Li et al. (2022) found that overqualified employees 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 team identity and work outcomes among individual members. Conversely, in teams where members' POQ levels have small differences, the higher the POQ mean, the more likely it is to be viewed by members as an "elite team," enabling them to develop high team identity and ultimately driving them to achieve 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 of team POQ mean on individual work outcomes through team identification. Specifically, these direct and indirect cross-level relationships are stronger under conditions of low POQ differentiation and weaker under conditions of high POQ differentiation.

The Positive Effect of Individual Perceived Overqualification on Individual Work Outcomes Under Team POQ Differentiation

Research Component Three addresses the question: Individual POQ implies human capital advantages, so can individual POQ have a positive effect on work outcomes? The vast majority of existing research has examined the negative effects of POQ on individuals, but meta-analytic results show that the relationship between POQ and job performance is not significant (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). In today's organizations, the phenomenon of overqualification is widespread (Li et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Clearly, if POQ only brings negative consequences, this does not align with reality. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply explore the potential positive effects of POQ and their pathways. Second, how does team-level POQ composition moderate the above positive effects? Existing research has found that team-level POQ can rationalize individual POQ and weaken its negative effects or strengthen its positive effects. Therefore, exploring the boundaries of the positive effects and pathways of in-

dividual POQ is also very important. Research Component Two explored the cross-level influence mechanism of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes through individual team (group) identification. In some studies involving team issues, status and team identification are closely related elements or indicators. For example, Mitchell et al. (2015) believe that both status and team identification play mediating roles in the process of leader inclusiveness affecting team performance. Liao et al. (2012) also emphasized the joint role of status and team identification when exploring the development process of team transactive memory systems from a social identity theory perspective. When exploring POQ issues in team contexts, deeper experiences brought about by social comparison and team interaction also face issues of team identification and status in the team. Therefore, we will further examine the role that individual status in the team may play. Additionally, given the subjectivity of POQ and its characteristic of not necessarily being officially recognized by the organization, this paper intends to examine the mediating role of informal (team) status between individual POQ and work outcomes. Accordingly, this paper will explore the positive effects and pathways of individual POQ, as well as the boundary effects of team POQ differentiation, based on expectation states theory (see Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]).

The Effect of Individual POQ on Informal (Team) Status. As mentioned above, previous research on the effects of POQ has mainly focused on the individual level, examining the negative psychological experiences and behavioral reactions triggered by employees' perception of their own overqualification. This research paradigm, which approximates the psychological model of "disappointed individuals lamenting their fate," rarely considers the role that other team members may play in the above process. Obviously, how other team members view a focal employee's overqualification issue is likely to affect that employee's behavioral reactions. According to expectation states theory, overqualified employees possess surplus qualifications in multiple aspects such as knowledge, skills, and abilities, and these individuals are likely to be viewed by other team members as more capable individuals, pillars of the team, etc., thereby gaining higher prominence, respect, and esteem in their eyes—that is, being granted higher informal (team) status by other team members (Anderson et al., 2001; van Dijk et al., 2020). Obtaining high informal status in the team can satisfy some of their psychological needs and bring them more resources, including greater cooperation from other members at work, becoming an informal information network center or channel in the team, and becoming an opinion leader. Additionally, related research shows that individual informal status has positive effects on creative output (Liu et al., 2015) and proactive change behavior (Deng & Liu, 2021). Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

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

The Indirect Effect of Individual POQ on Individual Work Outcomes.

Regarding the relationship between individual POQ and individual work outcomes, although existing research has mostly explored the negative effects of POQ on individual attitudes and behaviors, meta-analyses show that the relationship between POQ and individual performance (innovation, task) and OCB is not significant (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). Some scholars have begun to explore the indirect positive effects of POQ on individual outcomes. For example, Hu et al. (2015) examined the positive effect of employee POQ on in-role performance and OCB through the dual mediation of task importance and person-group fit, and the positive moderating effect of colleague POQ mean on the above dual mediation effects, finding that the moderating effect of colleague POQ mean is significant and that the dual mediation effect remains significant when colleague POQ mean is 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 the above mediation effect. 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 behavior from a self-regulation theory perspective. Based on expectation states theory, after individuals obtain high informal (team) status through their POQ, on the one hand, they have more advantages and resources to achieve high work outcomes; on the other hand, high-status individuals will also adjust their behavior according to standards that meet others' expectations out of the need to maintain this high informal (team) status advantage, thereby achieving high work outcomes to gain others' approval. Based on this, this paper argues that individual POQ will have a positive effect on 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.

Cross-Level Boundary Effect of Team POQ Differentiation. This paper 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 paper focuses on the boundary effect of team POQ differentiation. The reason is that individual informal (team) status reflects status differences among team members, and this status difference is precisely obtained by individuals through their POQ under conditions of POQ differentiation, rather than being premised on the level of team POQ mean. In teams with extremely low POQ differentiation, the informal status differences that individual POQ can bring are minimal—that is, the status advantages that all members can obtain through their POQ are similar. As POQ differentiation increases, the status differences that individual POQ can bring also increase. However, according to optimal differentiation theory, it is not difficult to understand 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 impact of individual POQ on informal (team) status may decrease. Based on this, this paper argues that team POQ differentiation has an inverted U-shaped moderating effect on the relationship between individual POQ and individual informal 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 effect of POQ on individual work outcomes through informal status. Specifically, the above direct and indirect relationships are strongest under conditions of moderate POQ differentiation and weaker under conditions of low or high POQ differentiation.

Theoretical Contributions

Based on the current social reality of the widespread phenomenon of overqualification in various organizations, and the existing research status that studies on perceived overqualification (POQ) have mainly focused on its negative effects at the individual level with insufficient attention to its potential positive effects, and that few studies have explored the multi-level effects of team-level POQ, this paper focuses on the potential positive effects of POQ in team contexts. It comprehensively considers the joint effects of two important dimensions of team-level POQ composition (team mean and team differentiation) and analyzes their multi-level impacts and mechanisms on team and individual work outcomes. The theoretical contributions of this paper are as follows:

First, this paper introduces team differentiation research into the field of perceived overqualification (POQ), integrating composition and compilation approaches to conduct a more three-dimensional analysis and exploration of POQ in team contexts, thereby revealing the multi-level effects of team POQ composition on team and individual work outcomes. The composition approach, which uses sample means to define team POQ, cannot comprehensively reflect the composition of POQ in teams. The compilation approach, which uses sample standard deviations to measure the dispersion of POQ in teams, can compensate for the shortcomings of defining team POQ through the composition approach. Previous research has understood and operationalized team POQ based on simple summation or averaging of all members' POQ (composition approach), while ignoring team differentiation in POQ (compilation approach). Obviously, it is difficult to capture the true picture of team POQ composition through linear methods such as summation or averaging, making it difficult to effectively explore the different composition situations of POQ and their differential impacts on team operations and outcomes, as well as on individual members. Self-categorization theory suggests that the more discrete individual characteristics are in a team, the easier it is to form team faultlines or subteams, which damages overall unity and coordination. Therefore, in two teams with equal POQ means, teams with smaller POQ differentiation may perform better

in various aspects. Thus, integrating composition and compilation approaches can provide a deeper understanding and comprehension of overqualification in teams.

Second, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, this paper explores the multi-level effects and mechanisms of POQ composition in team contexts on team and individual work outcomes. First, existing literature on POQ has mainly focused on the individual level, with few studies exploring the effects of team-level POQ. Nowadays, as the organizational environment becomes increasingly dynamic and complex, work teams have become more prevalent in organizations and serve as the most basic work unit (Mathieu et al., 2017). As the saying goes, “worry not about scarcity but about inequality,” the overall situation of POQ at the team level is obviously different from individual POQ. The proportion of overqualified members in a team and the level of POQ among members not only play a role at the individual level but also affect team processes and outcomes. To gain a deeper understanding of POQ in team contexts, identify its differences and connections with individual POQ, and thereby achieve a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the POQ phenomenon, it is urgent to focus on team POQ and explore its effects on team processes and outcomes. Therefore, based on social identity theory and the I-P-O model framework, this paper comprehensively examines the joint effects of team mean and team differentiation of POQ in team contexts on team positive processes and team work outcomes, aiming to compensate for the shortcomings of existing POQ research at the team level and provide management references for teams with POQ phenomena.

Second, based on social identity theory, this paper further explores the cross-level positive effects of team POQ composition on individual work outcomes, extending individuals’ psychological experiences and behavioral responses to their own POQ to their experiences and reactions to team POQ conditions, and more deeply analyzing the effects of team POQ composition, while also responding to scholars’ calls to examine cross-level effects of POQ in context (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Sierra, 2011). Existing research has rarely involved cross-level effects of POQ, with only a few studies examining the boundary effects of colleague POQ mean (Hu et al., 2015) or team POQ mean (Ma et al., 2019) on individual POQ effects. Individuals not only perceive and react to their own overqualification but also perceive 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, based on social identity theory and with individual team identity as a mediator, this paper 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 paper explores the differential positive effects of individual POQ on work output under conditions of team POQ

differentiation. Currently, academic research on the negative effects of individual POQ is quite rich, but exploration of its potential positive effects is still relatively scarce. Some scholars have proposed that new theoretical perspectives should be adopted to more broadly explore the positive effects of individual-level POQ (van Dijk et al., 2020). The state of overqualification may make individual employees feel frustrated, but it may also bring them higher informal (team) status, making them opinion leaders in the eyes of others. Therefore, from the perspective of expectation states theory and with individual informal status as a mediator, this paper examines the positive effects and pathways of individual POQ, as well as the boundary effects of team POQ differentiation.

Practical Contributions

The practical contributions of this paper are as follows: (1) Analyzing and exploring the positive effects of POQ in team contexts can effectively break the “talent acquisition and development paradox” and help organizations achieve “rational talent utilization.” Previous POQ research has mainly focused on exploring 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 only harmful without benefits, it would also contradict the increasingly fierce “talent wars” across various regions in China. Therefore, the research results of this paper can help organizations more comprehensively understand employee overqualification issues and provide important reference bases for organizations’ “acquisition, development, and utilization” of high-quality talent. (2) Comprehensively examining the joint effects of POQ mean level and differentiation degree in team contexts can provide practical guidance for organizations to more effectively form work teams and assign overqualified employees, thereby improving team management levels. Team POQ mean and team POQ differentiation are two key indicator dimensions for comprehensively understanding and depicting team POQ composition. They bring different unilateral effects on team processes and outcomes, but in reality, their effects are intertwined. By comprehensively examining the joint effects of team POQ mean and team POQ differentiation, fully exploring their impact effects and mechanisms, this paper can provide valuable guidance for organizations to more effectively manage employee overqualification issues in teams.

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