Overqualified Employees: A Review, A Research Agenda, and Recommendations for Practice

Mark Skowronski
Ramapo College of New Jersey

Managers are often concerned about hiring overqualified candidates, assuming that such individuals will be difficult to retain and keep satisfied. This paper reviews the consequences, moderators, and management of employee overqualification. The author identifies gaps in the literature, proposes an agenda for future research, and provides recommendations for practice. It is argued that prior research has been limited by its overreliance on self-reports of overqualification. Also, more research is needed to understand how hiring managers categorize candidates as overqualified, how coworkers perceive overqualification, and why individuals may choose to work in positions for which they are overqualified.

INTRODUCTION

Overqualified employees, or those who possess qualifications that exceed the requirements of their jobs (Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006a), comprise a significant portion of the workforce in developed economies (Harari, Manapragada, & Viswesvaran, 2017). Managers often fear overqualified employees, believing they will get bored and flee at the first available opportunity (Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró, & Truxillo, 2011a). However, such individuals may also provide businesses with more talent at a lower cost than they otherwise could acquire (Erdogan et al., 2011a). Overqualification, therefore, presents a challenge to employers, and there is a need for evidence-based strategies for managing these individuals.

As such, the purpose of the current paper is threefold. The first is to review the psychological and behavioral consequences of perceived overqualification as well as the conditions that moderate these effects. This summary is based on a vast body of literature that has accumulated over the last two decades and includes several narrative reviews (Erdogan et al., 2011a; Liu & Wang, 2012; McKee-Ryan &Harvey, 2011) and a meta-analysis (Harari et al., 2017). The second purpose of this paper is to identify gaps in the literature and directions for future research. Thirdly, the author proposes specific recommendations for the pre-hire and post-hire management of overqualified individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consequences of Perceived Overqualification

Managers often fear that overqualified employees will have poor job-related attitudes, and the research on overqualification justifies this concern. As McKee-Ryan and Harvey's (2011) review and Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis indicate, there is a significant negative correlation between perceived overqualification and job satisfaction. Overqualified employees may also be more likely to feel that their work lacks meaning (Luksyte, Spitzmueller, & Maynard, 2011), develop careerist attitudes (Bolino &

Feldman, 2000), feel alienated from their work (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), and experience lower levels of career satisfaction (Erdogan, Tomás, Valls, & Gracia, 2018) and job involvement (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). When employees feel overqualified, they tend to be less committed to their organizations, displaying lower levels of affective and (somewhat less consistently) normative organizational commitment (Harari et al., 2017). As Luksyte et al. (2011, p. 285) write "overqualified employees may perceive a job that is misaligned with their qualifications as a stepping stone to employment elsewhere and thus may view their exchanges with organizations in a narrow, transactional way, rather than in long-term psychological terms." Consistent with this pattern, overqualified employees tend to see their organizations as less fair (Fernandes, 2016).

These negative attitudes are not limited to the workplace and may affect an individual's overall wellbeing. Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis found a significant negative relationship between perceived overqualification and three dimensions of psychological wellbeing: strain, stress, and positive mood. However, their analysis did not find evidence of a relationship with physical wellbeing (e.g., physical symptoms, health status). Other research has found a higher number of psychosomatic symptoms and higher levels of depression, frustration, hostility, and insecurity among those who identify themselves as overqualified (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). Several studies have also found perceived overqualification to predict lower levels of life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2018; Newland, 2017).

Feelings of overqualification may also affect an individual's desire to leave their organization, as perceived overqualification is correlated with turnover intentions and job search behavior (Harari et al., 2017). The evidence is mixed, however, whether such steps lead to actual turnover. Maynard and Parfyonova (2013) found perceived overqualification predicted (actual) voluntary turnover over a six-month period. On the other hand, Buchel's (2002) analysis suggests that overqualified workers tend to have longer job tenure. Turnover is difficult to assess empirically due to its low base rate (Harari et al., 2017), and there are several reasons why overqualification may not lead to actual turnover. For example, overqualified employees may earn more than their less qualified peers in the same position (Erdogan et al., 2011a). It is also not clear that finding new employment is a successful strategy for the overqualified, as such individuals often continue to experience overqualification when reemployed in new positions (Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013; Erdogan et al., 2011a). It is also possible that only severe overqualification may lead to actual turnover (Liu & Wang, 2012).

The relationship between overqualification and performance is equally complex. Several studies have found overqualification to be inversely related to individuals' self-reports of job performance (e.g., Bolino & Feldman, 2000). However, other studies have found evidence that overqualified employees outperform their colleagues when performance is measured using supervisor/peer ratings (Fine & Nevo, 2008) or objective indicators such as sales data (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). It has been suggested that overqualified employees know that they could perform better if they were working in positions that more appropriately fit their qualifications (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Bolino & Feldman, 2000); as a result, they deflate their self-evaluations of their performance. Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis, however, did not find a significant relationship between perceived overqualification and task performance (i.e., performance of a job's core requirements), irrespective of the source of the performance ratings.

On the other hand, there is evidence that individuals who see themselves as overqualified engage in fewer organizational citizenship behaviors and more counterproductive work behaviors (Harari et al., 2017). Overqualified individuals may not envision themselves remaining with their employers for long periods of time and, therefore, may see little value in performing citizenship behaviors (i.e., tasks outside of their official duties) (Feldman & Maynard, 2011). However, these employees may be more likely to feel bored due to skill underutilization, which may cause them to behave in counterproductive and destructive ways (Luksyte et al., 2011). Overqualified employees may also engage in fewer adaptive performance behaviors, which are important for managing change (Wu, Tian, Luksyte, & Spitzmueller, 2017). Therefore, when performance is defined broadly to include citizenship, counterproductive, and adaptive behaviors, perceptions of overqualification may be a cause for concern.

Moderating Variables

The literature suggests that overqualification may not always have negative consequences and several variables may moderate its effects. For example, when individuals perceive their overqualification as less severe, more reversible, and within their control, they may be better able to tolerate it (Feldman, 2011). Employees who are less sensitive to inequities in the workplace (Erdogan et al., 2011a) and those with lower expectations of career advancement may be more willing to accept feeling overqualified. Higher levels of self-esteem also appear to buffer individuals from the psychological consequences of overqualification (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). Individuals who define themselves by their careers, however, seem to experience more negative effects (Erdogan et al., 2018). Those who are prone to negative moods and emotions (Johnson & Johnson, 2000) and narcissists (Feldman, 2011), for whom overqualification challenges their inflated sense of self, may also be more severely affected. In addition, some immigrant groups and those from certain cultures may have social norms that mitigate or accentuate the effects of overqualification (Fernandes, 2016; Maynard, Brondolo, Connelly, & Sauer, 2015).

An employee's social milieu is also relevant. Individuals may be better able to tolerate overqualification with high levels of social support, both inside and outside of the workplace (Erdogan et al., 2011a; Maynard, 2011). Being a member of a cohesive team and receiving high-quality leader-member exchanges appear to help individuals cope with feelings of overqualification (Alfes, Shantz, & Baalen, 2016). There is also evidence that peer overqualification may normalize and legitimize being overqualified (Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró, & Truxillo, 2011b). Hu et al.'s (2015) study found that when overqualified individuals were part of a group of other overqualified people, they demonstrated higher levels of performance, perceived their work as being more significant, and were more likely to see themselves as being a good fit for their team. As perceptions are often shaped by social comparisons, working with other overqualified employees may also reduce the likelihood of perceiving oneself as being overqualified irrespective of one's actual credentials (Sierra, 2011).

Individuals who see themselves as overqualified may also benefit from empowerment practices that give them control over and responsibility for how they perform their work tasks. Empowerment communicates an organization's trust in an employee's ability, judgment, and competence while also indicating that the person is of high status (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). Giving employees a sense of competence and autonomy may be enough to retain them despite their overqualified state. In a widely cited study of retail workers in Turkey, Erdogan and Bauer (2009) found empowerment to moderate the effects of perceived overqualification on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and voluntary turnover.

Lastly, perceived overqualification may be less harmful when the condition is voluntary. Although overqualification is often the result of circumstance (e.g., labor market conditions), some individuals may intentionally choose to work in positions for which they are overqualified, for example, to reduce work-family conflict (Erdogan et al., 2011a). The research on such intentional overqualification, although limited, suggests that choice may moderate the effects of feeling overqualified. There is evidence that individuals who work part-time or in temporary positions experience more positive attitudes and consequences if their work hours/work arrangements match their preferences (Maynard, 2011). Feldman and Turnley (2004) found academic faculty who worked contingently (i.e., in non-tenure track positions) experienced less relative deprivation if they had chosen such positions to balance non-work needs. On the other hand, if they had accepted contingent employment due to a weak job market, the effects were more negative.

Newland's (2017) study is one of the few to directly explore the role of volition in reducing the consequences of overqualification. In this study, intentionally overqualified individuals included those who (1) believed that they were overqualified for their current position, (2) knew that they were overqualified before accepting the job, and (3) felt comfortable taking the job despite knowing they would be overqualified. Results suggest that intentionally overqualified employees score significantly higher on measures of job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment, self-rated job performance, and life satisfaction than their involuntarily overqualified peers. They also report fewer turnover intentions. More research is needed to determine the causes and effects of such self-selection into overqualification.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As the review above indicates, overqualified employees are more likely to experience negative attitudes and a desire to leave their employers than others. However, these effects are not universal and are moderated by various individual, situational, and organizational variables. Future research should continue to identify moderators with the goal of developing strategies for management. In addition, there are several gaps in the literature concerning (1) the relationship between actual (i.e., objective) and perceived overqualification, (2) hiring managers' perceptions of and reactions to overqualified candidates, (3) the effects of coworkers' perceptions, and (4) the causes and consequences of intentional overqualification. Future research can advance our ability to manage overqualified employees by exploring these areas.

Objective Overqualification Versus Perceived Overqualification

Most research on overqualification has relied on subjective measures that ask employees if they feel that their qualifications exceed the requirements of their jobs. Less frequent are studies that attempt to measure overqualification objectively, for example, by comparing an employee's educational attainment to the average for his/her occupation. Alternatively, an individual's education, experience, and other measurable qualifications can be compared to an occupation's required qualifications as determined by a job analysis. There are many reasons why objective and subjective measures may produce different results for the same individual. Feelings of overqualification may be affected by psychological variables including comparisons with other employees, cognitive biases, dissonance effects, and different experiences (Maltarich, Reilly, & Nyberg, 2011). Perceptions of overqualification are also affected by personality traits such as narcissism (Harari et al., 2017). Narcissists, who have strong a sense of entitlement and a continual desire to enhance their self-esteem, are more likely to see themselves as overqualified even when their actual credentials do not justify such a perception (Maynard et al., 2015). The moderate correlation between measures of objective and subjective overqualification suggest that these are distinct constructs (Harari et al., 2017), and subjective overqualification may mediate the effects of objective overqualification (Lin, Law, & Zhou, 2017; Liu & Wang, 2012).

Despite the purity of measuring overqualification objectively, there are several reasons why subjective measures dominate the literature. Objective measures are difficult to develop as job content, even for the same job title, may vary widely across positions in different organizations (Maltarich et al., 2011). Subjective measures, due to their psychological nature, are assumed to better predict psychological outcomes such as job-related attitudes (Hu et al., 2015). Studies that have measured overqualification both objectively and subjectively typically find stronger effects of the latter on such outcomes as job satisfaction (Kahn & Morrow, 1991; Maynard et al., 2015) and counterproductive work behavior (Fine & Edward, 2017). Therefore, subjective methods may be most appropriate when exploring the psychological and behavioral effects of overqualification among current employees.

Nevertheless, there are reasons why the use of objective measures may enhance the field. First, it is difficult to establish causality between subjective overqualification and psychological outcomes, as these relationships may be reciprocal (Fine & Nevo, 2011). Not only may perceptions of overqualification create feelings of job dissatisfaction, but job dissatisfaction may also cause individuals to feel overqualified. Second, some outcomes, such as employees' ability to turnover, may be better predicted by objective measures of overqualification—as objectively overqualified individuals possess skills, knowledge, and abilities that may enable them to find employment in other organizations (Maltarich et al., 2011). Third, hiring managers are more likely to make decisions using objective methods (e.g., résumés, application forms). Therefore, research using objective measures will be more relevant to guiding selection practices (Fine & Nevo, 2011).

More research based on objective measures of overqualification may also provide insights into the relationship between overqualification and discrimination. Some scholars have suggested that women, racial minorities, and immigrant groups are more likely to experience overqualification than non-disadvantaged individuals (De Jong & Madamba, 2001; Feldman, 1996). Somewhat surprisingly,

however, Harari et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis did not find a significant correlation between perceived overqualification and gender. It is possible that group differences may be harder to detect with subjective measures of overqualification, as women and minorities may compare themselves to other members of their group, distorting their awareness of their overqualified state (Feldman, Leana, & Turnley, 1997; Harari et al., 2017). Learned helplessness, resulting from a history of discrimination, may also reduce the confidence of women and minorities and cause them to accept employment that is beneath their qualification level (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). If overqualification is more prevalent in certain groups (e.g., recent immigrants, older workers), the widespread rejection of overqualified candidates will adversely affect these populations and have possible legal implications. More research is needed to explore the complex relationship between overqualification and discrimination.

Hiring Managers' Perceptions

Several factors may influence whether a hiring manager identifies a candidate as overqualified (Martinez, Lengnick-Hall, & Kulkarni, 2014; Maynard, Taylor, & Hakel, 2009). Nevertheless, the perceptual process of hiring managers is a noticeable gap in the overqualification literature. There are reasons to believe, however, that both the knowledge and experience of hiring managers are relevant. If a hiring manager is unclear about the actual requirements of a job, he/she is not likely to judge a candidate's fit accurately. It is not uncommon in many organizations for job descriptions to be out of date (Tyler, 2013), and research suggests that supervisors and job incumbents often have different ideas about what a job requires (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2014). Jobs are also dynamic and may change over time, and hiring managers may fail to notice such changes (particularly if they do not directly supervise the positions for which they are hiring). As a result, these decision-makers may exclude candidates who possess qualifications that appear excessive that, in reality, are consistent with a job's real requirements. Additionally, hiring managers with minimal recruitment experience may be unfamiliar with the labor market and unaware of changing employment standards for various occupations (e.g., what were once preferred qualifications may now be expected). Such managers might have a lower threshold for labeling candidates as overqualified. Future research should explore what factors influence hiring managers' perceptions of a candidate's qualifications and fit.

Even when hiring managers have an accurate understanding of job requirements, their perceptions may still be affected by personal biases and motives. As Martinez et al. (2014) speculate, managers may consciously or unconsciously use a label of overqualification as a pretext for not hiring members of certain social groups (e.g., women, racial minorities, older workers). Managers' biases may also be rooted in self-interest. Organizational politics often influences selection decisions (Bozionelos, 2005), and hiring overqualified employees might create political risks or make managers feel insecure (Erdogan et al., 2011a). Qualitative studies (Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, & Martinez, 2015; Maynard et al., 2009) suggest that managers typically assume that overqualified individuals will have bad habits, will be difficult to retrain, are arrogant and opinionated, and will want to make disruptive changes. They may also fear that such employees will have unrealistic expectations, will frustrate their coworkers, and will create conflict. In addition, it is plausible that some managers may perceive overqualified candidates as a threat to their authority or, ultimately, their own jobs. These concerns might be particularly relevant if a candidate is likely to have a direct supervisory relationship with the hiring manager. Additional research is needed to determine the extent to which managers' political interests and personal insecurities affect their perceptions of and willingness to hire overqualified employees. However, there is evidence that, when hiring candidates they expect to work with, people may lower their qualification standards to select candidates with whom they believe they will enjoy having as coworkers (Nolan, Langhammer, & Salter, 2016). Hiring managers may do the same when deciding to accept or reject an overqualified candidate.

Coworkers' Perceptions

Although managers may feel that overqualified candidates will cause problems for their current staff, research on coworkers' perceptions of and reactions to overqualified individuals is lacking. Sierra (2011) suggests that overqualified employees may adversely affect the cohesiveness of teams if other members

feel less attracted to the group as a result. Teams consisting of both overqualified and less qualified members may engage in less information sharing, collaboration, and team monitoring behavior, reducing the team's ability to perform effectively (Sierra, 2011). Conflict may also occur when there are disagreements about who is, and who is not, overqualified. As described above, employees and managers may assess qualifications differently, reaching different conclusions about one's overqualification status. It is also likely that perceptions will differ among coworkers, and these disagreements may have adverse effects on group dynamics.

The overqualification literature often recommends that employers take specific steps to satisfy and retain overqualified individuals (see below). However, providing overqualified employees with special treatment may be problematic if the employees' less qualified peers believe these actions are unjustified (Sierra, 2011). Adams's equity theory (1965) predicts that differential treatment of employees that is disproportionate to differences in employees' "inputs" (i.e., what they bring to their jobs) will create feelings of inequity. If other employees do not identify these individuals as being genuinely overqualified, or they do not believe that their surplus qualifications are relevant to the position (and, therefore, do not make a greater contribution), any special treatment may seem unfair. These perceptions can elicit a variety of negative organizational consequences such as lower engagement, increased turnover, and more counterproductive behaviors among non-overqualified staff. Problems may also occur if employers assign leadership or mentorship roles to overqualified employees when other employees do not perceive these leaders/mentors as being overqualified. Future research should explore how the differential treatment of overqualified employees affects the morale and attitudes of other employees, particularly when self-perceptions of overqualification differ from those of one's peers.

Intentional Overqualification

As described above, a recent study (Newland, 2017) found individuals to experience better outcomes when they perceive their overqualification to be voluntary (i.e., a choice). In addition, it has been suggested that hiring managers are less likely to label these types of overqualified employees as risky hires (Martinez et al., 2014), a prediction supported by qualitative (Kulkarni et al., 2015; Maynard et al., 2009) and quantitative (Thompson, Sikora, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2015) research. People may choose to work in positions for which they are overqualified as a means of managing work-family conflict (Erdogan et al., 2011a), reducing stress (Maynard, 2011), increasing scheduling flexibility (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), or working within a more supportive/stable environment (Thompson, Shea, Sikora, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2013). They may also do so to satisfy intrinsic motivational needs by finding employment that gives them a sense of calling, meaning, and belonging (Lobene & Meade, 2013; Erdogan et al., 2011a; Lobene 2011). Overqualification may even be perceived as normal and acceptable when a person is pursuing a career change (Hu et al., 2015), or when individuals are using their jobs to expand their social networks or to acquire more experience and expertise (Erdogan et al., 2011b).

Most discussions on why some people choose to be overqualified are speculative and based on anecdotal evidence. However, Newland's (2017) study identified 15 motives for intentional overqualification. Some of these had been previously identified by Maynard, Thorsteinson, and Parfyonova (2006b) as reasons for choosing part-time over full-time work schedules (i.e., needing to care for relatives, transitioning to retirement, being a student, working for extra income, wanting more leisure time, wanting a part-time schedule, engaging in career exploration, wanting less responsibility, wanting an opportunity to apply expertise to different types of work, having personal health issues). Focus group data revealed five additional reasons for voluntary overqualification including (1) using the job as stepping stone to a better position, (2) desiring less stressful work, (3) moving into a new position where one would feel more capable, (4) wanting more purpose/meaning in one's occupation, and (5) wanting to leave a profession that one joined due to external pressures. The most frequent of these reasons were the need for extra income, a desire for a part-time schedule, and a desire for more time for non-work activities. It remains unknown, however, whether hiring managers react in more positive ways (e.g., more willing to make a hiring recommendation) to some reasons than to others.

It is likely that different reasons might have different managerial implications. Some motives, such as the desire to work in a job more in alignment with one's interests or seeking more meaningful work, may be consistent with organizational goals of high retention and performance. Other reasons, such as the desire to have more leisure time, to have a less stressful job, or to have a job with less responsibility, may be problematic if they suggest a desire to minimize work effort. Different motivations may also impact other employees. For example, Maynard et al.'s (2015) finding that narcissistic employees experience less career-related stress when they perceive themselves as overqualified suggests that some people may prefer situations where work is unchallenging and where they can feel superior to others. It is not difficult to imagine the problems that this may have on group cohesion and morale.

Different reasons for overqualification may also require different managerial interventions. An individual who is voluntarily overqualified in order to gain experience may benefit from mentorship or leadership training. On the other hand, those seeking greater work-life balance might benefit from flexible working arrangements. Future research should explore the various motivations underlying intentional overqualification as well as the implications of these different motives on managing such employees. Objective measures are appropriate for such research, as voluntarily overqualified employees may not perceive themselves as being overqualified (or not to the same extent as involuntarily overqualified individuals). It is also important to investigate how hiring managers and coworkers perceive and respond to the different motivations underlying intentional overqualification.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Consider the Time Horizon

When hiring, employers should carefully weigh the benefits of high performance with the costs of turnover. When turnover is less important than performance (e.g., positions that are of a short-term nature), the benefits of hiring overqualified candidates will likely be worth the risks (Lobene & Meade, 2013). If employee retention is paramount, hiring individuals whose qualifications more appropriately fit the position may be advisable (although the review above indicates that the risk of actual turnover is not always increased by overqualification). When employers value citizenship behavior or are concerned with employee morale, hiring overqualified candidates may also be riskier (Agut, Peiró, & Grau, 2009). It is important to remember that good management practices may mitigate the risks associated with overqualified employees even when hiring for the long term.

Seek and Provide Information

As described above, some job candidates and employees may be more accepting of overqualification for a variety of reasons and motives. Therefore, hiring managers should carefully seek out additional information during the selection process to identify an overqualified candidate's motivation. Using interview questions to explore what the candidate expects and values in a job may help determine if the candidate will fit the position despite their overqualified status (Wells, 2004). It may also be useful to determine whether or not the individual considers his/her job to be a calling (Lobene & Meade, 2013; Lobene, 2011) and if he/she is seeking intrinsic rewards from employment. Hiring managers should be mindful that their psychological insecurities and lack of confidence may affect their perceptions of candidates' qualifications and may exaggerate negative reactions toward individuals deemed overqualified (Erdogan et al., 2011a).

It is also important that candidates have realistic expectations about the job, knowing what the position will entail, and what they will/will not receive from the employment relationship. Providing a realistic job preview may increase the success of retaining overqualified individuals (Wells, 2004) by minimizing unpleasant surprises that could create feelings of inequity (Erdogan et al., 2011a). Managers should also consider at the time of hiring what opportunities they can realistically provide the overqualified candidate (Wells, 2004).

Understand the Law

In the United States, rejecting a candidate for being overqualified does not generally violate employment or anti-discrimination laws. The federal courts made this principle clear when they upheld the legality of the City of New London's decision to reject an applicant because he was "too smart" to be a police officer, even though the courts acknowledged that such a policy might be unwise (Robert Jordan v. City of New London and Keith Harrington, 1999 as cited in Moustafa & Miller, 2003). However, although "overqualification discrimination" is technically legal, age discrimination is not. The federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) forbids organizations with more than 20 employees from discriminating on the basis of age (for workers over 40 years old) in any aspect of employment (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018). If rejecting overqualified applicants is used as a pretext for refusing to hire older workers, the practice may violate the ADEA. Although the majority of federal courts have been inclined to accept employers' arguments for rejecting overqualified candidates, organizations are advised to assess an applicant's qualifications using objective, rather than subjective, job-related criteria (Morneau, 2000). In addition, managers should try to minimize the use of the term "overqualified" when discussing or rejecting applications as it might be interpreted as code language for age-related discrimination (Cavico, Mujtaba, & Samuel, 2016).

Empower Overqualified Employees

Research suggests that overqualified individuals leave jobs because of working conditions, not because they feel superior to their current positions (Thompson et al., 2013). As Erdogan and Bauer's (2009) study demonstrates, overqualified employees may be less likely to turnover if they feel empowered (i.e., they perceive high autonomy and job control). Employers should, therefore, look for ways to enrich the jobs of their overqualified employees when possible. Giving overqualified individuals challenging assignments is important because they allow such employees to utilize their skills. These opportunities may also help these individuals move into new roles that better match their qualifications (Alfes et al. (2016). The value of empowering employees has been studied extensively and is a well-established management principle (Spector, 1986).

Managers may also empower their overqualified employees by providing opportunities for job crafting, defined as "the physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work" (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). Managers who give employees discretion to change work tasks and responsibilities to fit their preferences are allowing their employees to better utilize their talents and may reduce overqualification perceptions (Liu & Wang, 2012). Job crafting has been found to increase overqualified employees' creativity and organizational citizenship behaviors (Lin et al., 2017).

Empowering overqualified employees may include providing them with mentorship and leadership roles. Such practices allow organizations to directly benefit from these individuals' advanced skill sets, and may improve the satisfaction and commitment of overqualified staff (Russell, Ferris, Thompson, & Sikora, 2016). Mentorship and leadership opportunities communicate to high potential employees that the organization recognizes their superior qualifications (Luksyte et al., 2011). More formally, employers may want to use overqualification as an opportunity for developing leadership pools and for succession planning (Thompson et al., 2013). Organizations might consider investing in formal leadership training programs for their overqualified workers or preparing them for other positions in the organization where they can more fully utilize their skills (Alfes et al., 2016).

Meet Employees' Needs

Individuals are better able to tolerate overqualification with high levels of social support, both inside and outside of the workplace (Erdogan et al., 2011a; Maynard, 2011). Support from team members helps cultivate feelings of belonging and increases one's self-esteem and job satisfaction (Alfes et al., 2016). To ensure a supportive environment, managers should strengthen team cohesiveness by, for example, delegating to teams complex tasks and empowering them with decision-making autonomy (Man & Lam, 2003).

Managers may want to regularly check in with their overqualified employees to ensure that they remain engaged, that their needs are being met, and that their job attitudes remain positive (Wells, 2004). These meetings are opportunities to explain how an individual's talent is being used in ways that the employee may not realize (Maynard, 2011) and helps contribute to the success of the organization (Alfes, Shantz & van Baalen, 2016). By communicating appreciation for these individuals' qualifications and emphasizing their value, overqualified staff may be less likely to become cynical and engage in counterproductive behaviors (Luksyte et al., 2011). It is also important that such employees feel that they can trust their employer over the long term (Luksyte et al., 2011) and that their employers have fulfilled the promises they made at the time of hiring (Erdogan et al., 2011a).

Employers should ensure that such extra attention does not adversely affect other employees in the organization. As Sierra (2011) advises, such differential treatment of overqualified employees should not threaten team cohesiveness, and other workers should perceive these special accommodations as being fair. Russell et al. (2016) suggest that special roles and privileges afforded to overqualified employees might lead to feelings of jealousy and insecurity among the rest of one's staff. On the other hand, such treatment may be accepted if the organization has a strong justice climate (Erdogan et al., 2011b).

CONCLUSION

An extensive body of research suggests that employees who feel overqualified may have more negative attitudes, be more likely to turnover, and engage in fewer organizational citizenship behaviors and more counterproductive behaviors than their peers. However, these effects are not universal and may be moderated by various individual, social, and job-related factors. Future research will advance our understanding of overqualification by comparing employees' self-perceptions with objective measures as well as the perceptions of hiring managers and other employees. Exploring the reasons why some individuals chose positions for which they are overqualified will also address a conspicuous gap in the literature and provide insights into how to effectively manage these individuals.

REFERENCES

Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267–299). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Agut, S., Peiró, J. M., & Grau, R. (2009). The effect of overeducation on job content innovation and career-enhancing strategies among young Spanish employees. *Journal of Career Development,* 36(2), 159-182.

Alfes, K., Shantz, A., & Baalen, S. (2016). Reducing perceptions of overqualification and its impact on job satisfaction: the dual roles of interpersonal relationships at work. *Human Resource Management Journal,* 26(1), 84-101.

Bolino, M. C., & Feldman, D. C. (2000). The antecedents and consequences of underemployment among expatriates. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 21(8), 889-911.

Bozionelos, N. (2005) When the inferior candidate is offered the job: The selection interview as a political and power game. *Human Relations,* 58(12), 1605-1631.

Buchel, F. (2002), The effects of overeducation on productivity in Germany – the firms' Viewpoint. *Economics of Education Review,* 21(3), 263-275.

Cavico, F. J., Mujtaba, B. G., & Samuel, M. (2016). Code words and covert employment discrimination: Legal analysis and consequences for management. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 5(3), 231-253.

De Jong, G. F., & Madamba, A. B. (2001). A double disadvantage? Minority group, immigrant status, and underemployment in the United States. *Social Science Quarterly,* 82(1), 117-130.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (2018). Age discrimination. Retrieved from https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/age.cfm.

Erdogan, B., & Bauer, T. N. (2009). Perceived overqualification and its outcomes: The moderating role of empowerment. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 94(2), 557-565.

Erdogan, B., Bauer, T. N., Peiró, J. M., & Truxillo, D. M. (2011a). Overqualified employees: Making the best of a potentially bad situation for individuals and organizations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology,* 4(2), 215-232.

Erdogan, B., Bauer, T. N., Peiró, J. M., & Truxillo, D. M. (2011b). Overqualification theory, research, and practice: Things that matter. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology,* 4(2), 260-267.

Erdogan, B., Tomás, I., Valls, V., & Gracia, F. J. (2018). Perceived overqualification, relative deprivation, and person-centric outcomes: The moderating role of career centrality. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 107, 233-245.

Feldman, D. C. (1996). The nature, antecedents and consequences of underemployment. *Journal of Management,* 22(3), 385-409.

Feldman, D. C. (2011). Theoretical frontiers for underemployment research. In D. C. Maynard & D. C. Feldman (Eds.), *Underemployment: Psychological, economic, and social challenges* (pp. 277–305). New York, NY: Springer.

Feldman, D. C, Leana, C. R., & Turnley, W. H. (1997). A relative deprivation approach to understanding underemployment. In C. L. Cooper & D. M. Rousseau (Eds.), *Trends in organizational behavior* (Vol. 4, pp. 43-60). New York: Wiley.

Feldman, D. C., & Maynard, D. C. (2011). A labor economic perspective on overqualification. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology,* 4(2), 233-235.

Feldman, D. C., Turnley, W. H. (2004). Contingent employment in academic careers: Relative deprivation among adjunct faculty. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 64(2), 284-307.

Fernandes, G. F. (2016). *Understanding perceived overqualification: Expanding the criterion space, establishing drivers, and developing a model.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://via.library.depaul.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1147&context=csh_etd

Fine, S., & Edward, M. (2017). Breaking the rules, not the law: The potential risks of counterproductive work behaviors among overqualified employees. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment,* 25(4), 401–405.

Fine, S., & Nevo, B. (2008). Too smart for their own good? A study of perceived cognitive overqualification in the workforce. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 19(2), 346-355.

Fine, S., & Nevo, B. (2011). Overqualified job applicants: We still need predictive models. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice,* 4, 240–242.

Harari, M. B., Manapragada, A., & Viswesvaran, C. (2017). Who thinks they're a big fish in a small pond and why does it matter? A meta-analysis of perceived overqualification. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 102(4), 28–47.

Hu, J., Erdogan, B., Bauer, T. N., Jiang, K., Liu, S., & Li, Y. (2015). There are lots of big fish in this pond: The role of peer overqualification on task significance, perceived fit, and performance for overqualified employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 100(4), 1228-1238.

Johnson, G. J., & Johnson, W. R. (1992). Subjective underemployment and psychosocial stress: The role of perceived social and supervisor support. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 132*(1), 11-21.

Johnson, G. J., & Johnson, W. R. (1997). Perceived overqualification, emotional support, and health. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology,* 27(21), 1906-1918.

Johnson, G. J., & Johnson, W. R. (2000). Perceived overqualification, positive and negative affectivity, and satisfaction with work. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality,* 15(2), 167-184.

Khan, L. J., & Morrow, P. C. (1991). Objective and subjective underemployment relationships to job satisfaction. *Journal of Business Research*, 22(3), 211-218.

Kulkarni, M., Lengnick-Hall, M. L., & Martinez, P. G. (2015). Overqualification, mismatched qualification, and hiring decisions: Perceptions of employers. *Personnel Review,* 44(4), 529-549.

Lin, B., Law, K. S., & Zhou, J. (2017). Why is underemployment related to creativity and OCB? A task-crafting explanation of the curvilinear moderated relations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(1), 156-177.

Liu, S., & Wang, M. (2012). Perceived overqualification: A review and recommendations for research and practice. *Research in Occupational Stress and Well-Being,* 10*,* 1-42.

Lobene, E. V. (2011). *Moderation of perceived overqualification: An exploration of career calling.* (Doctoral dissertation), Retrieved from https://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/bitstream/handle/1840.16/7175/etd.pdf?sequence=1&isAll owed=y

Lobene, E. V., & Meade, A. W. (2013). The effects of career calling and perceived overqualification on work outcomes for primary and secondary school teachers. *Journal of Career Development,* 40(6), 508-530.

Luksyte, A., Spitzmueller, C., & Maynard, D. C. (2011). Why do overqualified incumbents deviate? Examining multiple mediators. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* 16(3), 279-296.

Maltarich, M. A., Reilly, G., & Nyberg, A. J. (2011). Objective and subjective overqualification: Distinctions, relationships, and a place for each in the literature. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice,* 4*,* 236 –239.

Man, D. C., & Lam, S. S. (2003). The effects of job complexity and autonomy on cohesiveness in collectivistic and individualistic work groups: A cross-cultural analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 24(8), 979–1001.

Martinez, P.G., Lengnick-Hall, M.L., & Kulkarni, M. (2014). Overqualified? A conceptual model of managers' perceptions of overqualification in selection decisions. *Personnel Review,* 43(6), 957-974.

Maynard, D. C. (2011). Directions future underemployment research: Measurement and practice. In D. C. Maynard & D. C. Feldman (Eds.), *Underemployment: Psychological, economic, and social challenges* (pp. 253–276). New York, NY: Springer.

Maynard, D. C., Brondolo, E. M., Connelly, C. E., & Sauer, C. E. (2015). I'm too good for this job: Narcissism's role in the experience of overqualification. *Applied Psychology: An International Review,* 64(1), 208-232.

Maynard, D. C., Joseph, T. A., & Maynard, A. M. (2006a). Underemployment, job attitudes, and turnover intentions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* 27(4), 509-536.

Maynard, D. C., & Parfyonova, N. M. (2013). Perceived overqualification and withdrawal behaviours: Examining the roles of job attitudes and work values. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* 86(3), 435-455.

Maynard, D. C., Taylor, E. B., & Hakel, M. D. (2009). Applicant overqualification: Perceptions, predictions, and policies of hiring managers. In O. T. Chen (Ed.), *Organizational behavior and dynamics* (pp. 13–38). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science.

Maynard, D. C., Thorsteinson, T. J., & Parfyonova, N. M. (2006b). Reasons for working part-time: Subgroup differences in job attitudes and turnover intentions. *Career Development International*, 11(2), 145-162.

McKee-Ryan, F. M., & Harvey, J. (2011). "I have a job, but ...": A review of underemployment. *Journal of Management,* 37(4), 962-996.

Morneau, J. (2000) Too Good, Too Bad: "Overqualified" Older Workers. *Western New England Law Review,* 22(1), 45-75.

Moustafa, K. S., & Miller, T. R. (2003). Too intelligent for the job? The validity of upper-limit cognitive ability test scores in selection. *SAM Advanced Management Journal,* 68(2), 4-12.

Newland, S. (2017). *Intentional over-qualification: An exploration of motives and outcomes* (Master's Thesis, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand). Retrieved from https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/11096/thesis.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

Noe, R. A., Hollenbeck, J. R., Gerhart, B., and Wright, P. M. 2014. *Human Resource Management: Gaining A Competitive Advantage (9th Edition).* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Nolan, K. P., Langhammer, K., & Salter, N. P. (2016). Evaluating fit in employee selection: Beliefs about how, when, and why. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68(3), 222.

Russell, Z. A., Ferris, G. R., Thompson, K. W., & Sikora, D. M. (2016). Overqualified human resources, career development experiences, and work outcomes: Leveraging an underutilized resource with political skill. *Human Resource Management Review,* 26(2), 125-135.

Sierra, M. J. (2011). A multilevel approach to understanding employee overqualification. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology,* 4(2), 243-246.

Spector, P. E. (1986). Perceived control by employees: A meta-analysis of studies concerning autonomy and participation at work. *Human Relations,* 39(11), 1005-1016.

Thompson, K. W., Shea, T. H., Sikora, D. M., Perrewé, P. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2013). Rethinking underemployment and overqualification in organizations: The not so ugly truth. *Business Horizons,* 56(1), 113-121.

Thompson, K. W., Sikora, D. M., Perrewé, P. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2015). Employment Qualifications, Person–Job Fit, Underemployment Attributions, and Hiring Recommendations: A three-study investigation. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment,* 23(3), 247-262.

Tyler, K. (2013). Job worth doing: Update descriptions. *HR Magazine*, 58(1), 47-49

Wells, S. J. (2004). Too Good To Hire? *HR Magazine,* 49(10), 48-54.

Wrzesniewski, A., & Dutton, J. E. (2001). Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *The Academy of Management Review,* 26(2), 179-201.

Wu, C. H., Tian, A. W., Luksyte, A., & Spitzmueller, C. (2017). On the association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior. *Personnel Review*, 46(2), 339-354.