

**On the Association between Perceived Overqualification and Adaptive Behavior**

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**On the Association between Perceived Overqualification and Adaptive Behavior****Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this research was to offer an autonomous motivation perspective to explore the relationship between perceived overqualification and adaptive work behavior and examine job autonomy as a factor that may moderate the association.

**Design/ methodology/ approach** – The hypotheses were tested in two culturally, demographically, and functionally diverse samples: Sample 1 was based on North American community college employees ( $N = 215$ ); sample 2 was based on full-time workers, employed in a Chinese state-owned enterprise specializing in shipping ( $N = 148$ ).

**Findings** – In Study 1, perceived overqualification was negatively related to self-rated adaptive behavior. A follow-up Study 2 extended these findings by demonstrating that perceived overqualification was negatively related to supervisor-rated adaptive work behavior when job autonomy was low, rather than high.

**Implications** – The results of this research offer an autonomous motivation perspective to explain why perceived overqualification relates to adaptive behavior and suggests a job design approach to encourage adaptive behaviors of people who feel overqualified – a sizable segment of the current workforce.

**Originality/ value** – This is one of the first studies to explore adaptive behavior of workers who feel overqualified – an outcome that has not been examined in this domain. Our findings further point out what can be done to encourage adaptive behaviors among overqualified employees.

**Keywords:** Perceived overqualification; adaptivity; job design; job autonomy; underemployment

Individual adaptive behavior, or “the degree to which individuals cope with, respond to, and/or support changes that affect their roles as individuals” (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 331), has been regarded as an important work behavior for both individuals and organizations to cope with and master changes in work environment (Hesketh and Neal 1999, Pulakos et al., 2002, Shoss et al., 2012). As such, researchers have become increasingly interested in knowing how to promote individual adaptive behavior (Ployhart and Bliese 2006, Pulakos et al., 2002). To enhance adaptive behavior, the dominant meta-competency perspective (Baard et al., 2014) emphasizes the role of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) in facilitating individuals’ effective responses to changing situations (Ployhart and Bliese 2006, Pulakos et al., 2002). This meta-competency (or capability-based) perspective suggests that employees who have more KSAs than required for a job should be able to respond to changes more effectively because they have enough (and even more) capacities to learn new tasks, technologies, and procedures (Chen 2005, Kozlowski and Bell 2006, Kozlowski et al., 2001). Thus, following the meta-competency perspective, selecting employees who have surplus qualifications that are not required for a job (i.e., those who are overqualified; Erdogan et al., 2011, Kulkarni et al., 2015) may help enhance the prevalence of adaptive behavior in organizations as overqualified employees have enough (and even more) capacities to adapt to changes.

However, whether overqualified employees will engage in more adaptive behavior remains an open question. Drawing on a motivational perspective (Deci & Ryan, 2008), we suggest that overqualified employees will engage in less adaptive behavior due to the lack of autonomous motivation. According to Gagné and Deci (2005, p. 340), ‘being autonomously motivated means being motivated by one’s interest in an activity... and/or because the value and regulation of the activity have been integrated within one’s self...’. Researchers have generally found employees’ perception of overqualification often lead to undesirable work outcomes such as lower level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Erdogan

and Bauer 2009, Johnson and Johnson 2000, Maynard et al., 2006). In the same vein, we argue that overqualified employees will be less autonomously motivated (i.e., neither have strong intrinsic motivation nor identification with their work role) to utilize their capacity to cope, respond to, and support changes that often require additional effort and persistence (Griffin et al., 2007). Consistent with Eccles and Wigfield's arguments (2002, p. 112), 'even if people are certain they can do a task, they may have no compelling reason to do it'. To date, the linkage between overqualification and adaptive behavior has not been examined and whether overqualified employees will contribute through adaptive behaviors is still unknown. To fill this knowledge gap, in this study we examine the relationship between overqualification and adaptive behavior in organizations.

In addition to examining this association, we aim to identify boundary conditions to unpack when overqualified employees are more or less likely to engage in adaptive behavior. To answer this question, we explore the moderating role of job autonomy in this relationship. We focus on job autonomy for two primary reasons. First, as a key work design factor that can enhance one's intrinsic motivation (Hackman and Oldham 1976) and autonomous motivation broadly (Gagné & Deci, 2005), job autonomy represents a work situation that provides employees who feel overqualified with freedom to decide when and how to utilize their KSAs and determine their work activities (Meyer et al., 2010). In essence, for these workers, having higher job autonomy will increase their willingness to use their under-utilized skills for adapting and supporting change. Second, consistent with the theoretical assertion that engagement in adaptive behavior depends not only on their personal attributes, such as KSAs, but also their work environment (Shoss et al., 2012), our focus on job autonomy responds to recent calls to conduct more research to investigate the impact of contextual factors on adaptive behavior (Baard et al., 2014).

In doing so, this study offers several theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, this research offers a different view from the conventional meta-competency perspective to understand the association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behaviors. By examining the moderating role of job autonomy from an autonomous motivation perspective, this investigation extends the extant adaptivity literature by unpacking how individual attributes (e.g., perceived overqualification) and situational factors interactively shape adaptive behavior. Practically, our research provides actionable steps to encourage overqualified employees to engage in adaptive behaviors via job redesign (i.e., increasing job autonomy). Below, we briefly review research on adaptive behavior and perceived overqualification and then provide arguments to underpin our hypotheses.

### **Adaptive Work Behavior**

The conceptualization and definition of adaptive behavior has varied widely (Baard et al., 2014). A number of taxonomies exist, such as Pulakos et al.'s (2000) eight-dimensional model, B. Griffin and Hesketh's (2003) three-dimensional model, and M.A. Griffin et al.'s (2007) multi-level adaptive behavior model. In this study, we follow M. A. Griffin et al.'s (2007) definition and focus on adaptive behavior at individual level because it concerns the concept of 'dealing with uncertain work situations,' a core element of adaptive behavior (Pulakos et al., 2000). Individual adaptivity also is more proximal and fundamental than team and organizational adaptivity in predicting when and how an employee will react to change. Adaptive behavior differs from other conceptually similar constructs such as task performance (Allworth and Hesketh 1999, Griffin et al., 2007, Shoss et al., 2012). In particular, being adaptive is not part of formal job requirements. Further, being adaptive is not usually explicitly linked to formal performance appraisals and requires abilities and effort to '[deal] effectively with unpredictable and changing work situations and [learn] new tasks, technologies, and procedures' (Shoss et al., 2012). It also is different from other types of

work-related behavior such as proactivity, which focuses on initiating change (Griffin et al., 2007, Griffin et al., 2010), or citizenship behavior that concerns performing extra-role activities such as helping others at work (Allworth and Hesketh 1999).

In order to be adaptive at work (i.e., cope and respond to changes effectively), research has suggested that people need to have capacities and motivation to do so (Chen et al., 2005, Pulakos et al., 2002). On the one hand, people need capacities (e.g., KSAs and experience) to know how to react to change. On the other hand, they also have to be autonomously motivated to utilize their capabilities to cope with and adapt to change effectively. Supporting this view, research has suggested that employees who possess prerequisite KSAs and experiences (Allworth and Hesketh 1999, Chen et al., 2005, Levy and Sharma 1994) and strong intrinsic motivation (Pulakos et al., 2002) and work identification (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2014) are more likely to engage in adaptive behaviors than those lacking these characteristics. Incorporating research on predictors of adaptive behavior, we will next elaborate on why and when employees who feel overqualified may be apt to be adaptive or not.

### **Perceived Overqualification**

Perceived overqualification is a type of underemployment ‘where the individual has surplus skills, knowledge, abilities, education, experience, and other qualifications that are not required by or utilized on the job’ (Erdogan et al., 2011, p. 217). Perceived overqualification has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of two facets: mismatch (i.e., having more qualifications than is required) and no-growth, which refers to lack of opportunities to utilize one’s skills (Johnson and Johnson 1996). Building on the person-job fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), recent studies showed that the mismatch dimension best represents the construct of perceived overqualification because

having more qualifications than required for a job represents a misfit between one's qualifications and a job (Liu et al., 2015, Luksyte et al., 2011, Maynard et al., 2006).

Whereas it is possible to measure specific forms of underemployment objectively by, for example, comparing required and possessed education levels for a job (Luksyte and Spitzmueller 2011, McKee-Ryan and Harvey 2011, Scurry and Blenkinsopp 2011), overqualification is best measured subjectively because it is concerned with individuals' overall judgment of compatibility between their skills, knowledge, abilities, education, experiences and their job. Further, employees may use different referent comparisons (e.g., past employment, current coworkers in comparable positions, etc.) when they evaluate the fit of their qualifications with the job at hand (Luksyte and Spitzmueller 2011). Two people both working in a comparable job can have different subjective experiences of overqualification (McKee-Ryan et al., 2009). These perceptions likely affect their behavior because they are stronger, more proximal predictors of individual work behavior, which reflects the employee's perception of the situation and 'thus the reality to which she (or he) responds' (Maynard and Parfyonova 2013, p. 437). Accordingly, we focus on *perceived* overqualification in this research.

Extant research has mainly examined outcomes of perceived overqualification, with mixed results. It showed that people who feel overqualified experience decreased job satisfaction and low affective commitment (Johnson and Johnson 2000, McKee-Ryan et al., 2009) and have lower self-rated performance (Bolino and Feldman 2000). They are more likely to leave their jobs (Erdogan and Bauer 2009, Maynard et al., 2006), and tend to engage in more counterproductive work behaviors (Liu et al., 2015, Luksyte et al., 2011), and fewer extra-role behaviors (Agut et al., 2009), although some inconsistent findings were also reported (see Liu and Wang 2012, for a review). For example, perceived overqualification has been found to positively relate to supervisor rated in-role performance (Holtom et al.,

2002), organizational citizenship behavior (Chen 2009), overall job performance (Fine 2007, Fine and Nevo 2008), and objective job performance indicators (Erdogan and Bauer 2009).

This means that evidence regarding the relationship between perceived overqualification and job performance is, at best, inconclusive. Not surprisingly then, Erdogan and Bauer (2009) concluded that ‘more research into the moderators in the overqualification-performance relationship is warranted’ (p. 563).

To date, whether people who feel overqualified engage in adaptive behavior or actions to effectively adjust and deal with uncertain work situations and challenges (Pulakos et al., 2002), remains under-explored. This is surprising as adaptive behavior has been identified as one of the three key forms of overall job performance together with proactivity and proficiency (Griffin et al., 2007). Such behaviors not only contribute to individual effectiveness but also enhance the effectiveness of groups and organizations (Griffin et al., 2010). Considering the centrality of adaptive work behavior and the potential of employees who feel overqualified to be adaptive, we next discuss the possible links between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior.

### **Perceived Overqualification and Adaptive Behavior: Their Association and Moderating Role of Job Autonomy**

To effectively respond to changing job requirements and organizational environment, employees need not only possess high capabilities or competencies, but also willingness to respond to and support change (Baard et al., 2014, Ployhart and Bliese 2006). As such, although people who feel overqualified have enough (and even more) capacities to successfully respond to and support changes (Ployhart and Bliese 2006), they may lack an autonomous motivation to do so. Specifically, according to Deci and Ryan (2008, p.182), ‘autonomous motivation comprises both intrinsic motivation and the types of extrinsic motivation in which people have identified with an activity’s value and ideally will have



integrated it into their sense of self.’ As their surplus capacities are not fully appreciated, people who feel overqualified tend to have lower intrinsic motivation and weak identification with their work role due to poor person-job fit (Luksyte et al., 2011, Maynard et al., 2006). In addition, people who feel overqualified tend to experience feelings of relative deprivation (Feldman et al., 2002) as they think they are entitled to better jobs and, thus may be less satisfied with their current jobs and more likely to search for alternatives. As such, these workers tend to have negative attitudes toward their jobs (Erdogan and Bauer 2009, Feldman et al., 2002) and thus they may not be motivated to alter and apply their competencies in response to anticipated or current changes (Shoss et al., 2012). Therefore, we propose:

*Hypothesis 1:* Perceived overqualification will be negatively related to adaptive behavior.

Drawing on the job design theory (Hackman and Oldham 1975), we further suggest that higher job autonomy can motivate overqualified employees to be adaptive and thus provide a function to mitigate the hypothesized negative association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior. Job autonomy refers to the extent to which employees can determine their work methods, pace, and effort to accomplish work tasks (Hackman and Oldham 1975). Higher job autonomy represents a work situation without restricted formal rules and procedures (Meyer et al., 2010) in which employees can rely more on their discretion to do their work (Krasman 2013, Prieto and Pérez-Santana 2014). Autonomous jobs thus bring higher autonomous motivation than strictly controlled jobs because job autonomy helps employees feel self-determined and free from external constraints (Deci et al., 1989, Spreitzer 1995).

We suggest that having higher job autonomy will bring more benefit for employees who feel overqualified than others because job autonomy elicits more autonomous motivation at work that in turn increases their willingness to adapt and perform. As indicated by Wu et al.

(2015, p.921), ‘job autonomy can enhance employees’ sense of value at work and thus lower the feelings of relative deprivation and heighten the job satisfaction of overqualified employees’. In line with this notion, Erdogan and Bauer (2009) have found that psychological empowerment, which included the level of self-determination at work, can mitigate the negative association between perceived overqualification, job satisfaction and voluntary turnover. Their finding implies that job autonomy, as it enhances self-determination at work (Kraimer et al., 1999), is likely to mitigate the hypothesized negative link between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior. Thus, we propose:

*Hypothesis 2:* Job autonomy will moderate the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior such that it will be weaker when job autonomy is high.

### **Overview of the Present Research**

We conducted two studies to examine our research hypotheses. As the association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior has not been examined before, we first examine their association in Study 1. The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate this main effect and additionally examine the moderating role of job autonomy. As different measures have been used to assess perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior, in the interest of triangulation and consistent with other research (Grant and Berry 2011, Grant et al., 2009), we thus used different measures of perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior across the two studies. Finally, we recruited participants from different cultural and organizational settings (employees from a community college in Study 1 and employees from a transportation company in Study 2) to ensure that our findings about the association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior are not constrained by a specific, selected setting.

### **Study 1 – Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

We surveyed 215 employees (response rate was 59%) of a community college in Southern Texas, USA. The participants were 66% women; their mean organizational tenure was nine years ( $M = 9.10$ ,  $SD = 7.19$ ). The majority (60.5%) were 46 years old or older. They varied in race/ethnicity with 69% White, 13% Black, 10% Hispanic, 6% other, and 2% Asian. In terms of education, 35% had a Master's degree, 25% an Associate degree, 16% a Bachelor's degree, 11% a Doctorate degree, 5% a high school diploma, 5% a GED diploma, and 3% other. The participants performed a variety of roles: 34% were classified staff, 30% professional staff, 29% faculty, and 7% administrator.

### **Measures**

All measures across the two studies, if not indicated otherwise below, used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Perceived overqualification.** We measured perceived overqualification using Maynard and colleagues' (2006) nine-item Scale of Perceived Overqualification. The scale assesses the extent to which employees feel their qualifications are compatible with their job requirements (e.g., 'I have more abilities than I need in order to do my job;'  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Adaptive behavior.** We measured adaptive behavior with a four-item scale of change commitment developed by Fedor et al., (2006). The scale assesses the extent to which people have intentions to act on behalf of the change by coping with, responding to and/ or supporting change (e.g., 'I am trying to convince others to support current organizational changes;'  $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Control variables.** We controlled for age, gender, organizational tenure, and education because of their potential to influence adaptive behavior. In particular, gender and education interacted with age to predict one of the behavioral manifestations of adaptive behavior (i.e., adaptive selling; Levy and Sharma 1994). Further, employees with a lot of

work experience tend to plateau at their adaptive selling ('the altering of sales presentations across and during customer interactions in response to the perceived nature of the sales situation', (Levy and Sharma 1994, p. 39), suggesting that tenure is an important factor to consider when exploring this work behavior.

## **Study 1 - Results and Discussion**

### **Measurement Model**

We first conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the distinctiveness of used measures of perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior (Kline 2005). We used MPlus (Muthén and Muthén 2012) to fit two measurement models: 1) a one-factor model where all items load on one factor and 2) a two-factor model, wherein the items of perceived overqualification load on one factor and items of adaptive behavior load on a separate factor. Although the model fit of the two-factor model ( $SB-\chi^2 = 225.24$ ,  $df = 64$ ; CFI = .84; TLI = .80; RMSEA = .11 with 90% C.I. = .09 to .12; SRMR = .07) was not excellent (Kline 2005), it was better than the model fit of the one-factor model ( $SB-\chi^2 = 402.20$ ,  $df = 65$ ; CFI = .67; TLI = .60; RMSEA = .16, with 90% C.I. = .14 to .17; SRMR = .12), suggesting that the two measures were not identical. The correlation of the two latent factors was .30 ( $p < .01$ ).

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among research variables. Because the data were not nested (i.e., employees self-rated all the measures), we conducted hierarchical regression analyses using SPSS software to test the hypotheses. Table 2 presents the results. At the first step, we entered the control variables – gender, age, organizational tenure, and education. At the second step, we entered the main effects of the independent variable – perceived overqualification. Supporting Hypothesis 1, perceived overqualification was negatively related to adaptive behavior ( $B = -.32$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t = -5.17$ ,  $p$

< .001); and contributed unique incremental variance in predicting adaptive behavior ( $\Delta R^2 = .13, p < .01$ ). These findings provided initial support to the idea that although people who feel overqualified have capacities to effectively handle organizational changes, they may lack autonomous motivation to do so. Despite the informative nature of this study, common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) might have influenced the results as we measured independent and dependent variables at the same time using self-reported measures.

To provide a stronger test, we conducted Study 2 in which we utilized supervisors' ratings of individual adaptive behavior. Further, to identify boundary conditions of our findings we examine the hypothesized moderating role of job autonomy in Study 2. Moreover, to explore the linkage between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior in a different context, we used a demographically and culturally different sample in Study 2.

## **Study 2 - Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

A total of 148 employees and their 27 supervisors, working in eight different self-contained business units of a Chinese state-owned transportation company, participated in this study. Separate questionnaires were administered to the employees and their supervisors. Respondents were informed that the survey aimed to examine the impact of Human Resource practices on work experience of employees, and were assured of the confidentiality of responses. Each respondent placed his/her completed survey into a sealed envelope, and returned it to a box set up in the Human Resources department. The majority of the participants were men (65%), with a mean age of 37.06 years ( $SD = 7.83$ ). Employees' average organizational tenure was 7.63 years ( $SD = 7.17$ ). In terms of education, 48% held a graduate degree, 36% had completed a bachelor's degree, 16% held a high school degree, and 1% had completed middle school or less education.

### **Measures**

**Perceived overqualification.** We measured perceived overqualification with a four-item scale (Johnson et al., 2002). It assesses employees' perceptions about whether one's qualifications exceeded those required by the job at hand (e.g., 'My formal education overqualifies me for my present job;'  $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Job autonomy.** We measured job autonomy with a three-item sub-scale of autonomy in decision making from Morgeson and Humphrey's (2006) Work Design Questionnaire. The scale assesses the extent to which people have freedom in deciding when, how, and why they perform their work tasks (e.g., 'The job allows me to make a lot of decisions on my own;'  $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Adaptive behavior.** We measured adaptive behavior with a three-item scale of individual task adaptivity developed by Griffin et al., (2007). We asked supervisors to rate the extent to which their employees cope with, respond to, and/ or support changes that affect their individual work roles (e.g., "The employee adapted well to changes in core tasks;"  $\alpha = .82$ ). The response scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*).

**Control variables.** We used the same control variables as in Study 1.

## Study 2 - Results and Discussion

### Measurement Model

We first conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the distinctiveness of the measures (Kline 2005). We used MPlus (Muthén and Muthén 2012) to fit three measurement models: 1) a one-factor model where all items load on one factor, 2) a two-factor model, wherein the items of independent variables (perceived overqualification and job autonomy) load on one factor and dependent variable of adaptive behavior load on a separate factor, and 3) a three-factor model, wherein all the items load on their respective factors. The best fitting model was a three-factor model ( $SB-\chi^2 = 70.46$ ,  $df = 32$ ; CFI = .95; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .09 with 90% C.I. = .06 to .12; SRMR = .06). Both the two-factor model ( $SB-\chi^2 =$

252.76,  $df = 34$ ; CFI = .71; TLI = .61; RMSEA = .21 with 90% C.I. = .19 to .24; SRMR = .14), and 2) and the one-factor model ( $SB-\chi^2 = 474.02$ ,  $df = 35$ ; CFI = .42; TLI = .25; RMSEA = .29 with 90% C.I. = .27 to .32; SRMR = .20) had poor fit. Thus, the results of the CFA supported the distinctiveness of our measures. In the three-factor model, perceived overqualification was positively correlated with job autonomy ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and negatively correlated with adaptive behavior ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Job autonomy was positively correlated with adaptive behavior ( $r = .19$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

### **Hypothesis Testing**

The descriptive statistics and correlations among Study 2 variables are presented in Table 3. Although we hypothesized relationships between individual-level variables, participants were naturally assembled into workgroups because they reported to different supervisors. Due to the nested nature of the data, we used analysis of variance to calculate the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC (1)) to determine whether this clustering would affect the results. The ICC (1) was 0.44, suggesting that 44% of variance in individual adaptive behavior is explained by group membership. Thus, we used multilevel modelling to test the hypotheses. We used a two-level model to test our hypothesis to account for non-independent data. Table 4 displays the multilevel modelling results. Scores of job autonomy and perceived overqualification were grand-mean centered in our analysis. In the first step, we entered the main effects of job autonomy and perceived overqualification while controlling for gender, age, education and tenure at Level 1. There were no predictors at Level-2. Except for the intercept at Level 1, we did not specify random effects on coefficients at Level 1 as such effects were not significant in preliminary analysis. Thus, this model is a random intercept model. We estimated the model using HLM 7 (Raudenbush et al., 2010).

Supporting Hypothesis 1, perceived overqualification was negatively related to adaptive behavior ( $B = -.16$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = -2.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). When we additionally included the

interaction term between job autonomy and perceived overqualification at Level 1, we found that job autonomy moderated the relationship between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior ( $B = .11$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t = 2.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ). To further probe the nature of this interaction, we plotted simple slope regression lines of adaptive behavior regressed on perceived overqualification for high and low levels (i.e., +1 and -1 SD from mean) of job autonomy (Aiken & West, 1991). As illustrated in Figure 1, the simple slope between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior was negative and significant when job autonomy was low ( $B = -.33$ ,  $t = -4.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ); whereas the simple slope between overqualification and adaptive behavior was non-significant when job autonomy was high ( $B = -.06$ ,  $t = -0.68$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This finding is in line with the pattern described in Hypothesis 2, but further indicates that employees who feel overqualified are particularly discouraged from engaging in adaptive work behavior when they perceive low levels of job autonomy. Extending the results of Study 1 about the negative linkage between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior, the findings of Study 2 further unpacked the debilitating effects of person-job misfit, which are likely to be exacerbated by low levels of job autonomy.

### **General Discussion**

The results of this research showed that perceived overqualification was negatively related to adaptive behavior. This suggests that employees who feel overqualified are generally less likely to respond to and support change than employees who do not feel overqualified. However, such negative tendency can be potentially attenuated when overqualified employees are provided with higher autonomy at work, which presumably provides increased autonomous motivation for these workers to apply their capacities to adapt to change. These results have important theoretical and practical implications that we discuss below.



### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

With regard to the individual adaptivity literature, our investigation expands current thinking about individual-level adaptive behavior in two notable areas. First, our study highlighted the importance of perceived person-job fit (manifested in perceived overqualification) in influencing individuals' adaptive behaviors. Although the meta-competency approach to individual adaptivity suggests that those who have higher KSAs are more likely to engage in adaptive behavior (Chen 2005, Kozlowski and Bell 2006, Kozlowski et al., 2001), this approach does not fully account for the level of one's KSAs for a job at hand, which can be either lower or higher. The latter represents poor job-person fit (or overqualification) and can influence one's job attitudes and behaviors. In considering these issues, we emphasized the importance of incorporating person-job fit in the meta-competency approach to individual adaptivity and proposed the importance of autonomous motivation in shaping adaptive behavior.

Second, our results contribute to the individual adaptivity literature by identifying job autonomy as a key boundary condition which shapes adaptive behavior of workers who feel overqualified. Baard et al. (2014) recommended that adaptivity studies need to take a contingent approach and identify contextual factors that can directly or indirectly shape adaptive behavior. Extending Baard et al.'s (2014) research, we found that having higher autonomy at work can mitigate the negative association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior and having lower autonomy at work can accentuate such negative associations. These findings underscore the importance of work environment in either facilitating or inhibiting adaptive behavior amongst employees who perceive themselves as overqualified. Moreover, as job autonomy has been verified as motivational tool that helps to increase employees' autonomous motivation at work (see Parker 2014, for a review), the moderating effect of job autonomy highlights the potential role of autonomous motivation in

explaining the association between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior, which should be empirically tested in future studies.

With regard to the overqualification literature, our research extends the scope of behavioral consequence of perceived overqualification by focusing on adaptive behavior – an outcome that has not been explored in overqualification research. This extension is theoretically important as adaptive behavior is different from other types of job performance that have been examined in the overqualification literature, such as task performance (Erdogan and Bauer 2009), organizational citizenship behavior (Chen 2009), counterproductive work behaviors (Liu et al., 2015, Luksyte et al., 2011), or creativity (Luksyte and Spitzmueller 2015). Further, consistent with a finding that job autonomy helps mitigate the negative consequences of perceived overqualification on job satisfaction especially in highly individualistic countries (Wu et al., 2014), our findings in Study 2 suggest usefulness of granting higher job autonomy in mitigating the negative consequences of perceived overqualification on employees' adaptive behavior.

Practically, given the current findings, our results suggested that organizations concerned about losing overqualified employees, who can be adaptive or creative (Luksyte and Spitzmueller 2015) if the conditions are right, first have to identify those who feel overqualified, and then implement effective strategies to encourage their adaptive behaviors. From a job design perspective, we argue that perceived overqualification may not only be an issue of poor selection (Fine and Nevo 2011), wherein employees are hired despite their apparent person-job misfit. Perceived overqualification may be an emergent issue (Erdogan et al., 2011), wherein employees grow overqualified because of poor or inadequate job design. Organizations should recognize the distinct advantages of hiring employees who feel overqualified. Yet, they must also be mindful about the potential detrimental outcomes of hiring these workers and how these negative consequences could be amplified if they

perceive low levels of autonomy and believe they have little impact in shaping their work environment. To minimize these potentially negative consequences, we recommend that managers handle perceived overqualification by focusing on providing employees with greater job autonomy, which allows them to determine, for instance, the pace, sequence, and methods for accomplishing tasks without major organizational constraints and restrictions. For example, employees who feel overqualified may determine in which order and with whom they accomplish tasks. They may also experiment with different ways of task completion and take responsibility for their results.

### **Limitation and Future Research**

We should note several limitations. First, although the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior was observed in two different samples, in order to increase generalizability of our findings, our results should be cross-validated in samples from other settings. Also, as we used different measures of perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior across the two studies, it is also sensible to cross-validate our findings to ensure they are robust across samples and settings. Second, although our findings are consistent with arguments based on an autonomous motivation perspective, we did not directly measure the theoretical mechanisms undergirding processes of why perceived overqualification was related negatively to adaptive behavior and why low levels of job autonomy further exacerbated this link. Future studies are encouraged to directly measure the underlying mechanisms. Third, common method variance could have influenced the results (Podsakoff et al., 2003) as perceived overqualification and adaptive behavior in Study 1 and perceived overqualification and job autonomy in Study 2 were measured at the same time using self-reported measures. Notably, although (a) common method variance cannot account for interactions (Evans 1985, Lai et al., 2013, Siemsen et al., 2010) and (b)

results of CFA supported the discriminant validity of our measures in both studies, the use of temporally-separated data will lend more credence to the present findings.

Future studies can extend our work in several ways. First, in addition to job autonomy, are there any other factors that can motivate people who feel overqualified to be adaptive? From a leadership perspective, empowerment leadership that enables and encourages employees to apply their capacity at work may achieve the same effect as job autonomy showed in our study. If so, then empowerment leadership provides a different channel from the job design approach to enhance adaptivity of overqualified employees. The role of leadership has been rarely discussed in the overqualification literature, which may be a fruitful research avenue for future studies. Second, we only examined individual adaptivity, however, adaptivity can be manifested at team and organizational level. Future research could extend our focus to move adaptivity from individual to higher levels of analysis. This extension is meaningful as team or organization adaptivity can contribute to team and organization effectiveness in dealing with complex changes of the modern work environments. Exploring factors that can motivate people who feel overqualified not only to be adaptive at their own work but also contribute at the team and organization level is practically important because this knowledge will help maximize the utilization of human capital in organization.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics among Research Variables (n = 215)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Gender (Female = 1)	0.66	0.48	--				
2. Age	3.77a	1.09	-.05	--			
3. Education	--	--	.05	-.03	--		
4. Tenure (years)	9.1	7.19	-.12	.43**	-.12	--	
5. Perceived overqualification	2.56	0.79	.03	.04	-.02	-.04	--
6. Adaptive behavior	3.46	0.72	.09	.01	-.07	-.17*	-.27**

*Note.* a: Age categories were: 1 = 18-25, 2 = 26-35, 3 = 36-45, 4 = 46-55, 5 = 56-65, 6 = over

65 years old. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 2

*Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Adaptive Behavior in Study 1 (n = 215)*

Variable	Step 1 <i>B</i>	Step 2 <i>B</i>
Gender	14 (.11)	14 (.11)
Age	.07 (.05)	.08 (.05)
Education	-.09* (.04)	-.08 (.04)
Organizational tenure	-.02** (.01)	-.02** (.01)
Perceived overqualification		-.32** (.06)
$R^2$	.07	.20
$\Delta R^2$		.13**
$F$	3.32*	8.39**

*Note.*  $N = 215$ . Coefficients are unstandardized and standard error values are in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .



Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics among Research Variables in Study 2 (n = 148)*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender (Female = 1)	0.66	0.48	--					
2. Age	37.06	7.83	.23**	--				
3. Education	--	--	-.08	-.53**	--			
4. Tenure (years)	7.64	7.17	.07	.48**	-.40**	--		
5. Perceived overqualification	4.63	1.08	.18*	.12	-.03	.19*	--	
6. Job autonomy	4.72	1.15	.28**	.19*	-.14	.10	.32**	--
7. Adaptive behavior	5.49	0.98	-.04	.16	-.18*	.10	-.15	.15

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4

*Results of Multilevel Analysis with Estimates of Fixed Effects in Study 2 (n = 148)*

Parameters	Model 1				Model 2			
	Est.	S.E.	95% C.I.	95% C.I.	Est.	S.E.	95% C.I.	95% C.I.
Intercept	5.20	.77	3.69	6.72	5.30	.76	3.80	6.79
Gender	-.18	.16	-.51	.14	-.19	.16	-.51	.13
Age	.02	.01	-.01	.04	.01	.01	-.01	.04
Education	-.06	.12	-.29	.17	-.06	.12	-.29	.17
Tenure	.00	.01	-.02	.02	.00	.01	-.02	.02
Perceived overqualification	-.16*	.07	-.30	-.02	-.19**	.07	-.33	-.06
Job autonomy	.11	.07	-.02	.24	.12	.07	-.01	.25
Overqualification × Job autonomy					.12*	.05	.02	.22
Residual	.59				.57			
Pseudo- $\Delta R^2$					.02			

*Note.*  $N = 148$ ; \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $\Delta R^2$  was calculated using Singer (1998) formula  $(\sigma_{\text{unconditional}} - \sigma_{\text{conditional}}) / \sigma_{\text{unconditional}}$ .

Figure 1. Interactive effects of perceived overqualification and job autonomy in predicting adaptive behavior.

