Impact of Employees' Perceived Overqualification on Constructive Deviant Behavior

Jing Liu[1], and Lu Suo[2]
Stamford International University, Thailand
E-mail: 447388619@qq.com

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Abstract

This article aimed to study (1) the positive effects of perceived overqualification on constructive deviant behavior, including organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance; (2) the mediating role of work identification, comprising self-identification, team identification, and organizational identification, in the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviant behavior; (3) the underlying mechanism through which perceived overqualification promotes constructive deviant behavior among employees in high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The sample consisted of 394 employees from SMEs in Henan Province, China. Participants were selected using simple random sampling based on employee lists provided by SMEs, with snowball sampling subsequently applied by asking initial respondents to distribute the online questionnaire link to other eligible employees. The instrument for collecting data was an online questionnaire developed from well-established measurement scales. Analysis of the data was conducted using descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The research results were found as follows:

1. The results indicated that perceived overqualification (POQ) was positively associated with organizational constructive deviance (OCB) (β = .175, $p < .001$) and interpersonal constructive deviance (ICB) (β = .226, $p < .001$). Furthermore, POQ was positively associated with self-identification (β = .592, $p < .001$), team identification (β = .294, $p < .001$), and organizational identification (β = .199, $p < .001$).

2. Work identification plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviant behavior. Self-identification, team identification, and organizational identification were positively associated with OCD and ICD (all $p < .001$), supporting their mediating roles in the relationships between POQ and employee behavioral outcomes.

3. The proposed theoretical model was supported. All hypothesized relationships were statistically significant, demonstrating that work identification explains the psychological mechanism through which perceived overqualification promotes constructive deviant behavior and providing

empirical evidence for understanding the positive outcomes of perceived overqualification in organizational settings.

This study extends existing research on perceived overqualification by revealing its potential positive consequences and identifying the multilevel psychological mechanism through which employees transform excess qualifications into constructive workplace behaviors. The findings provide practical implications for talent management and innovation development in high–tech SMEs.

Keywords: perceived overqualification; constructive deviant behavior; work identification

Introduction

Perceived overqualification (POQ) refers to employees' subjective perception that their education, knowledge, skills, and work experience exceed the requirements of their current jobs (Maynard et al., 2006). With the expansion of higher education and increasing labor market mismatch, POQ has become a common organizational phenomenon worldwide (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). Previous studies have predominantly emphasized its negative consequences, including burnout, turnover intention, job dissatisfaction, and psychological contract breach (Cheng et al., 2020; Maynard et al., 2006). More recent research, however, suggests that overqualified employees may transform surplus knowledge and skills into valuable organizational outcomes, such as innovation, proactive behavior, and constructive deviance (Luksyte et al., 2011; Galperin, 2012). Despite these advances, three important research gaps remain. First, existing studies have focused primarily on the negative consequences of POQ, while its positive behavioral outcomes remain underexplored. Second, limited attention has been paid to the psychological mechanism through which POQ promotes constructive deviant behavior. Third, most studies have examined single–level mediators, overlooking the multilevel role of work identification.

These gaps are particularly important in high–tech SMEs, where innovation and organizational adaptability largely depend on employees' initiative and discretionary behaviors. Existing empirical studies have mainly focused on large enterprises or mixed–industry samples, while evidence from high–tech SMEs remains limited. Furthermore, constructive deviant behavior has generally been treated as a one–dimensional construct, despite evidence suggesting that organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance represent distinct forms of positive workplace behavior (Galperin, 2012). Drawing on person–environment fit theory, identity theory, and social identity theory, this study proposes that employees' work identification, which includes self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification, constitutes an important psychological mechanism linking perceived overqualification to constructive deviant behavior. The study focuses on high–tech SMEs in Henan Province, China, where rapid industrial transformation and increasing talent mismatch provide a meaningful context for examining this relationship.

Objectives

1. To investigate the positive effects of perceived overqualification on organizational constructive deviant behavior and interpersonal constructive deviant behavior.

2. To examine the mediating roles of self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification in the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviant behavior.

3. To develop and validate a multilevel theoretical model explaining the psychological mechanism through which perceived overqualification influences constructive deviant behavior.

Literature Review

Perceived Overqualification and Constructive Deviant Behavior

Perceived overqualification (POQ) has attracted increasing attention in organizational behavior research over the past two decades. (Maynard et al., 2006) defined POQ as employees' subjective perception that their education, knowledge, skills, or work experience exceeds the requirements of their current jobs. Early studies primarily interpreted POQ from a deficit perspective. Drawing on relative deprivation theory (Erdogan et al., 2011), it is argued that employees who perceive themselves as overqualified often experience feelings of deprivation because they believe their capabilities are underutilized. Similarly, (Luksyte et al., 2011) and (Liu et al., 2015) found that POQ is associated with job dissatisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, and turnover intention. These studies generally concluded that qualification mismatch leads to unfavorable work attitudes and behaviors.

However, more recent studies have questioned this one–sided perspective. (Harari et al., 2017) suggested that overqualified employees possess greater human capital and cognitive resources, enabling them to generate higher performance under appropriate organizational conditions. Likewise, (Lu et al., 2023) argued that employees with surplus knowledge and skills are more capable of producing innovative solutions, while (Zheng et al., 2024) demonstrated that POQ can stimulate deviant innovation behavior by encouraging employees to challenge conventional work routines. These findings indicate that POQ may not necessarily produce dysfunctional outcomes but can also promote constructive workplace behaviors.

Constructive deviant behavior, introduced by (Galperin, 2012), refers to intentional violations of formal organizational norms that are undertaken to improve organizational effectiveness or benefit stakeholders. It comprises two distinct dimensions: organizational constructive deviance, which targets organizational improvement, and interpersonal constructive deviance, which focuses on helping colleagues or customers. Although emerging evidence suggests that POQ may encourage constructive deviance, existing studies remain limited because

they mainly examine innovation behavior or voice behavior rather than the multidimensional nature of constructive deviance.

The Mediating Role of Work Identification

The relationship between POQ and employee behavior is unlikely to be direct. Identity–based theories suggest that employees' behavioral responses depend on how they perceive themselves within the work environment.

According to (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), work–related identity develops at three levels: individual, relational, and collective. Based on this perspective, the present study conceptualizes work identification as comprising self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification.

At the individual level, (Lord and Brown, 2003) argued that self–identification reflects employees' perceptions of competence, autonomy, and self–worth. Similarly, (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) suggested that employees with stronger self–identification are more willing to undertake proactive and change–oriented behaviors. (He & Li, 2024) further proposed that POQ can strengthen employees' confidence in their capabilities, thereby enhancing self–identification and encouraging constructive behaviors beyond formal job requirements.

At the relational level, (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000) defined team identification as employees' psychological attachment to their work group. Employees with stronger team identification tend to internalize team goals and cooperate more actively with colleagues. Empirical studies by (Hirst et al., 2009) and (Desivilya et al., 2010) demonstrated that team identification promotes knowledge sharing, creativity, and discretionary helping behaviors, suggesting that it may facilitate both organizational and interpersonal constructive deviance.

At the collective level, (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) proposed that organizational identification reflects employees' perception of oneness with their organization. (Smidts et al., 2001) further argued that organizational identification strengthens employees' emotional attachment and motivates them to pursue organizational goals. More recently, (Astakhova & Porter, 2015) reported that employees with stronger organizational identification are more likely to demonstrate proactive, change–oriented, and extra–role behaviors. Consequently, organizational identification may represent an important mechanism through which overqualified employees convert surplus qualifications into constructive contributions.

Research Gaps and Theoretical Positioning

Despite substantial progress, several important gaps remain.

First, previous studies have predominantly emphasized the negative consequences of POQ, such as burnout, turnover intention, and psychological contract breach (Maynard et al., 2006; Erdogan et al., 2011), while relatively little attention has been paid to its constructive behavioral outcomes.

Second, although recent studies have begun to examine innovation behavior (Lu et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2024), the influence of POQ on constructive deviant behavior, particularly its organizational and interpersonal dimensions (Galperin, 2012), remains insufficiently explored.

Third, most existing studies have investigated single mediators, such as psychological contract, job burnout, or organizational identification (Luksyte et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2021). Few studies have integrated self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification into a unified multilevel framework based on identity theory and social identity theory.

To address these gaps, the present study integrates person–environment fit theory, identity theory, and social identity theory to develop a multilevel mediation model explaining how perceived overqualification promotes organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance through work identification.

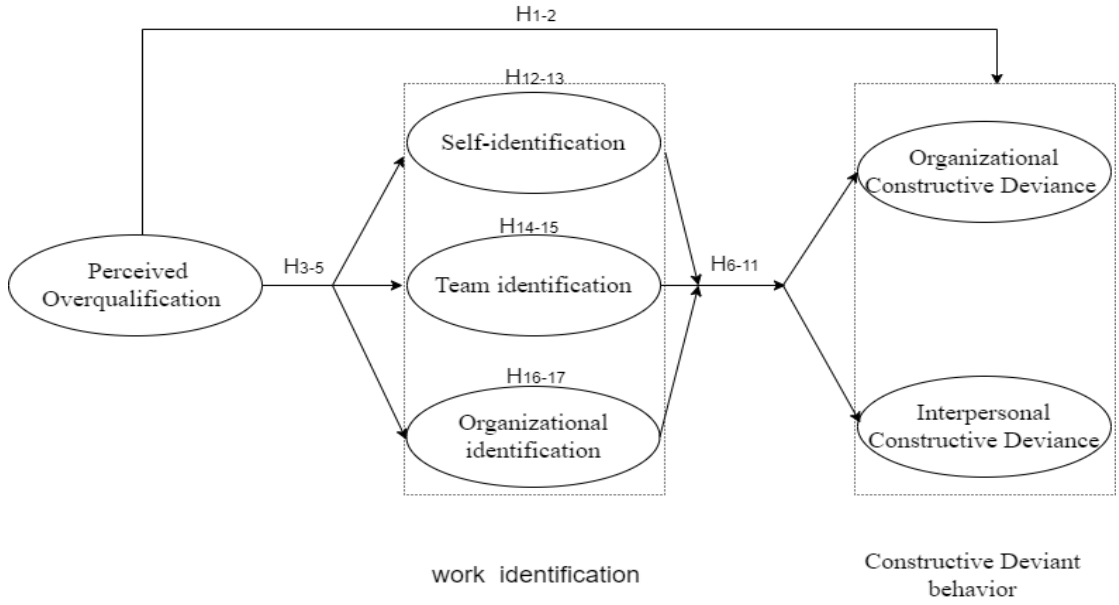
Summary of the Literature Review

The existing literature demonstrates that perceived overqualification has evolved from being regarded solely as a source of job mismatch and employee withdrawal to being recognized as a potential source of organizational value. Nevertheless, previous studies have paid limited attention to the identity–based psychological mechanisms through which overqualified employees engage in constructive deviant behavior.

Building on person–environment fit theory (Kristof–Brown et al., 2005), identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2009), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this study proposes that employees transform surplus qualifications into constructive workplace behaviors through three complementary forms of work identification: self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification. By distinguishing between organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance, the proposed framework extends both the perceived overqualification literature and constructive deviance research while providing a more comprehensive explanation of the positive behavioral consequences of perceived overqualification.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a quantitative study. The research conceptual framework is developed based on Person–Environment Fit Theory, Identity Theory, and Social Identity Theory. It consists of one independent variable (Perceived Overqualification), three mediating variables (self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification), and two dependent variables (organizational constructive deviant behavior and interpersonal constructive deviant behavior). The framework proposes that perceived overqualification influences constructive deviant behavior directly and indirectly through work identification. The proposed conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.



Note: POQ represents the independent variable "Perceived Overqualification."

SI represents the variable "Self–identification"

TI represents the variable "Team identification."

OI represents the variable "Mediating variable" organizational identification.

OCD represents the dependent variable "Organizational Constructive Deviance."

ICD represents the dependent variable "Interpersonal Constructive Deviance."

Research Methodology

Sample and data collection

This study targeted employees of technology–based SMEs in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, China. The eligible SMEs were identified based on the Evaluation Measures for Technology–based Small and Medium–sized Enterprises (Document No. 115 [2017]) issued by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Finance, and the State Taxation Administration, and the Notice on Conducting the Evaluation of Technology–based Small and Medium–sized Enterprises throughout the Province in 2024 issued by the Henan Provincial Department of Science and Technology. According to official records, approximately 1,509 technology–based SMEs were registered and evaluated in Zhengzhou City in 2024. The accessible employee population was obtained from employee lists provided by participating enterprises.

The inclusion criteria were employees aged 18 years or older who were currently working in qualified technology–based SMEs in Zhengzhou City. Interns, temporary workers, and individuals not directly employed by qualified SMEs were excluded.

Data were collected from May to October 2025 through an online questionnaire administered via Wenjuanxing. Simple random sampling was used as the primary sampling

method by randomly selecting employees from enterprise employee lists. Snowball sampling was employed as a supplementary method, in which initial respondents were invited to share the questionnaire link with other eligible employees through their professional networks.

Before participation, respondents were informed of the research purpose, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent procedures. Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Stamford International University. A total of 394 valid responses were obtained for analysis.

Measures

The questionnaire comprised 46 measurement items covering four constructs and was measured using a seven–point Likert scale. A total of 406 questionnaires were distributed. After excluding incomplete and invalid responses, 394 valid questionnaires were retained, yielding a valid response rate of 97.0%. The final sample exceeded the minimum sample size recommended by (Hair et al., 2010) for structural equation modeling, ensuring adequate statistical power for subsequent data analysis.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 and IBM SPSS AMOS 24. SPSS 27 was employed for data screening, descriptive statistics, and reliability analysis. AMOS 24 was used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), assess the measurement and structural models, and test the proposed hypotheses using structural equation modeling.

Research Result

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	239	60.7
	Female	155	39.3
Age	18–24	68	17.3
	25–34	134	34
	35–44	107	27.2
	45–60	85	21.6
Educational qualifications	College and below	71	18
	Bachelor's degree	126	32
	Master's degree	132	33.5
	Doctoral degree and above	65	16.5
Job type	Administrative management	86	21.8
	Technical/Research and Development	146	37.1
	Marketing	126	32
	Financial management	24	6.1
	Others	12	3

	1 year or less	87	22.1
	2–3 years	42	10.7
Job tenure	4–6 years	80	20.3
	7–10 years	136	34.5
	More than 10 years	49	12.4
	2 years or less	79	20.1
	3–5 years	18	4.6
Working years	6–10 years	79	20.1
	11–15 years	139	35.3
	More than 15 years	79	20.1
Total		**394**	**100**

Collectively, the demographic characteristics of the sample, the employee group of high-tech SMEs in Zhengzhou investigated in this study present a relatively mature and professional human resource structure. In terms of gender structure, the proportion of males is slightly higher, which is consistent with the talent distribution characteristics of technology-based enterprises. The age distribution is relatively balanced: the group aged 25–44 constitutes the main body, reflecting the core working-age structure of the organization, while a certain proportion of young, middle-aged, and elderly employees are also included, balancing vitality and experience. At the educational level, more than 60% of respondents hold bachelor's or master's degrees, and the proportion of doctoral degree holders is also considerable, indicating a high overall educational level and reflecting enterprises' dependence on knowledge-based and high-level talents. The job type distribution is dominated by technical/R&D and marketing, forming a dual-wheel-driven pattern centered on technological innovation and market transformation, with administrative and financial positions performing supporting functions. In terms of position tenure and overall working years, medium- and long-term employees account for a high proportion: groups with more than 7 years of position tenure and more than 11 years of overall working experience constitute the main body of the sample, indicating that enterprises have a certain foundation in human resource stability and experience accumulation.

Taken together, the sample shows a reasonable hierarchical distribution in age, education, job structure, and professional experience, which not only reflects the knowledge-intensive and technology-oriented organizational characteristics of high-tech SMEs but also provides a relatively solid sample foundation for the subsequent empirical test and model analysis of the relationships among variables.

Structural Model Fit

Table 2 Fit Indices of Structural Models in This Study

Fit indices	χ2/df	GFI	AGFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Recommended	<3	>0.8	>0.8	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08
Structural Model	1.198	0.903	0.891	0.985	0.984	0.985	0.022

Table 2 presents the fit indices of the proposed structural model. The results indicate that the structural model generally meets or exceeds the recommended criteria for structural equation modeling, demonstrating a satisfactory overall model fit. Specifically, the χ^2/df ratio is 1.198, which is below the recommended threshold of 3.0, while the RMSEA value is 0.022, substantially lower than the recommended cutoff value of 0.08, indicating an excellent level of approximate model fit.

Furthermore, the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.985), incremental fit index (IFI = 0.985), and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI = 0.984) all exceed the recommended criterion of 0.90, suggesting a high level of incremental model fit. Although the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI = 0.891) is slightly below the more stringent criterion of 0.90, both the goodness-of-fit index (GFI = 0.903) and AGFI exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.80 recommended by Baumgartner and Homburg (1995) and Doll et al. (1994).

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the proposed structural model fits the sample data well, indicating that the theoretical model has satisfactory adequacy and explanatory power. Therefore, the model provides a sound basis for the subsequent hypothesis testing and mediation effect analysis.

Reliability and Validity Analysis

Table 3 Reliability and Validity

Variable Factor naming	Cronbach's α	C.R.	AVE
POQ	0.922	0.924	0.575
SI	0.928	0.929	0.521
TI	0.825	0.809	0.514
OI	0.901	0.901	0.603
OCD	0.934	0.925	0.710
ICD	0.909	0.901	0.696

Table 3 presents the results of the reliability and validity analyses. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's α values ranged from 0.825 to 0.934, Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.809 to 0.929, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.514 to 0.710, all exceeding the recommended thresholds of 0.70 for Cronbach's α and CR and 0.50 for AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2022; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), indicating satisfactory

internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. As shown in Table 3, the square roots of the AVE for all constructs (0.717–0.843) were greater than the corresponding inter–construct correlations, satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion and confirming adequate discriminant validity. Overall, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, supporting its suitability for subsequent structural equation modeling and hypothesis testing.

Table 4 Discriminant Validity

Constructs	ICD	OCD	OI	TI	SI	POQ
ICD	0.834					
OCD	0.462	0.843				
OI	0.000	0.417	0.777			
TI	0.463	0.613	0.310	0.717		
SI	0.628	0.567	–0.024	0.429	0.722	
POQ	0.539	0.445	–0.059	0.222	0.591	0.758

Note: The diagonal bolded value is the square root of the AVE value

Hypothesis Tests

Table 5 Path Analysis and Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	Unstd.	S.E.	C.R.	p	Result
H1	POQ ⟶ OCD	0.175	0.172	0.052	3.343	***	Accepted
H2	POQ ⟶ ICD	0.226	0.235	0.060	3.939	***	Accepted
H3	POQ ⟶ SI	0.592	0.655	0.066	9.937	***	Accepted
H4	POQ ⟶ TI	0.294	0.305	0.062	4.953	***	Accepted
H5	POQ ⟶ OI	0.199	0.202	0.056	3.574	***	Accepted
H6	SI ⟶ OCD	0.335	0.298	0.046	6.445	***	Accepted
H7	SI ⟶ ICD	0.346	0.325	0.053	6.173	***	Accepted
H8	TI ⟶ OCD	0.344	0.326	0.045	7.282	***	Accepted
H9	TI ⟶ ICD	0.250	0.249	0.048	5.166	***	Accepted
H10	OI ⟶ OCD	0.366	0.356	0.042	8.376	***	Accepted
H11	OI ⟶ ICD	0.278	0.285	0.046	6.185	***	Accepted

Note: *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; ***P < 0.001

From Table 5, we know that all direct paths in the research model are statistically significant, indicating that Perceived Overqualification not only directly promotes constructive deviance but also further enhances individuals' constructive deviance tendency by improving self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification. The overall structural model is supported by the data.

Mediation Effects

Table 6 Mediation Effect Analysis

NO	Path	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Boot S.E.	Bootstrap 95%CI	Mediation Type	Result
H12	POQ ⟶ SI ⟶ OCD	0.172	0.195	0.367	0.042	[0.12,0.289]	Partial	Accepted
H13	POQ ⟶ SI ⟶ ICD	0.235	0.213	0.448	0.039	[0.147,0.297]	Partial	Accepted
H14	POQ ⟶ TI ⟶ OCD	0.172	0.099	0.272	0.023	[0.062,0.153]	Partial	Accepted
H15	POQ ⟶ TI ⟶ ICD	0.235	0.076	0.311	0.024	[0.036,0.131]	Partial	Accepted
H16	POQ ⟶ OI ⟶ OCD	0.172	0.072	0.244	0.02	[0.036,0.113]	Partial	Accepted
H17	POQ ⟶ OI ⟶ ICD	0.235	0.057	0.292	0.017	[0.028,0.098]	Partial	Accepted

Note. N = 394. CI = Bias-corrected 95% confidence interval based on 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Total effect and direct effect are reported with standard regression coefficients and standard errors; indirect effect is reported with bootstrap standard error and confidence interval. Decision rule: If the 95% CI of the indirect effect excludes zero, the mediation effect is significant and the hypothesis is supported. All variables were standardized.

Table 6 presents the bootstrap mediation results. The 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for all indirect effects excluded zero, indicating that self-identification, team identification, and organizational identification significantly mediated the relationships between perceived overqualification and both organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance. Accordingly, all proposed mediation hypotheses (H12–H17) were supported. Because both the direct and indirect effects remained significant, all mediation effects were classified as complementary partial mediation. The magnitude of the indirect effects differed across the three mediators, with self-identification exhibiting the strongest mediating effect, followed by team identification and organizational identification. Furthermore, the total effects on interpersonal constructive deviance were consistently greater than those on organizational constructive deviance, suggesting that employees with perceived overqualification are more likely to translate their surplus qualifications into constructive behaviors directed toward colleagues than toward the organization. Overall, the findings confirm that work identification serves as a key psychological mechanism linking perceived overqualification to constructive deviant behavior.

Discussion

This study developed and empirically tested an integrated model linking perceived overqualification, work identification, and constructive deviance. Work identification was conceptualized as a hierarchical construct comprising self-identification, team identification, and organizational identification, while constructive deviance was classified into organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance following (Galperin, 2012). Based on 394 valid responses, the structural equation modeling results supported all seventeen hypotheses, demonstrating that perceived overqualification positively predicts constructive deviant behaviors and indirectly predicts such behaviors through employee identification. through multiple levels of

work identification. These findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed theoretical framework and offer new insights into the psychological mechanisms through which perceived overqualification is translated into positive workplace behaviors.

First, the findings demonstrate that perceived overqualification has significant positive effects on both organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance. Consistent with recent research (Harari et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2024), employees who perceive themselves as possessing surplus knowledge, skills, and experience tend to be more likely to identify problems, generate innovative solutions, challenge inefficient work practices, and proactively assist coworkers. When organizations provide sufficient autonomy, these excess qualifications are transformed into constructive actions that improve organizational procedures and support colleagues. Thus, perceived overqualification serves as an important resource foundation for both forms of constructive deviance.

Moreover, these findings extend the existing literature, which has predominantly emphasized the negative consequences of perceived overqualification from the perspectives of Relative Deprivation Theory and Person–Job Fit Theory (Erdogan et al., 2011; Luksyte et al., 2011). Rather than inevitably leading to undesirable outcomes, perceived overqualification can generate positive workplace behaviors when employees interpret their surplus qualifications as valuable resources and develop positive work-related identities, thereby moving beyond the traditional deficit perspective.

More importantly, this study reveals the hierarchical mediating mechanism through which work identification links perceived overqualification to constructive deviance. Self-identification, team identification, and organizational identification each exert significant partial mediating effects, indicating that perceived overqualification influences constructive deviance both directly and indirectly by strengthening employees' psychological attachment to themselves, their teams, and their organizations. These three dimensions represent successive levels of identity development that collectively form a progressive psychological pathway from the individual level to the team level and ultimately to the organizational level, while each dimension operates through distinct psychological processes and behavioral functions.

Self-identification, team identification, and organizational identification jointly explain how perceived overqualification is translated into organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance through complementary psychological mechanisms. Self-identification represents the foundational mechanism whereby perceptions of surplus qualifications strengthen employees' confidence in their competence and motivate behaviors that are consistent with their self-concept, supporting the core proposition of Identity Theory (Burke, 1991). Team identification extends this self-oriented motivation to the collective level by encouraging employees to channel their capability advantages toward improving team performance, knowledge sharing, and

collaborative innovation, consistent with Social Identity Theory (Van Knippenberg, 2000). Organizational identification further integrates employees' surplus capabilities with organizational goals and values, motivating them to undertake constructive but norm–challenging behaviors that enhance organizational effectiveness and long–term development. Rather than operating as a simple linear progression, these three forms of work identification constitute a complementary multilevel psychological transmission mechanism, linking individual identity affirmation, collective belonging, and organizational value internalization to explain how perceived overqualification is transformed into constructive workplace behaviors.

New Knowledge from Research

This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the positive effects of perceived overqualification on both organizational and interpersonal constructive deviance. It further develops a multilevel mediation framework in which self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification explain how surplus qualifications are transformed into constructive workplace behaviors. By distinguishing between organizational and interpersonal constructive deviance, the study reveals that perceived overqualification has stronger effects on interpersonal constructive deviance. Finally, evidence from high–tech SMEs in Henan Province extends the contextual applicability of existing theories and provides practical guidance for converting overqualified employees' capabilities into innovation and organizational value.

Conclusions

The results support the proposed theoretical model. The measurement and structural models demonstrated satisfactory reliability, validity, and model fit, confirming the robustness of the research framework. Perceived overqualification was found to have significant positive effects on both organizational constructive deviance and interpersonal constructive deviance. Furthermore, work identification served as a significant mediating mechanism, with self–identification, team identification, and organizational identification all partially mediating the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviant behavior. Among the three mediators, self–identification exhibited the strongest mediating effect, followed by team identification and organizational identification, indicating a hierarchical psychological transmission process. Overall, all proposed hypotheses were supported, providing empirical evidence that perceived overqualification can be transformed into constructive workplace behaviors through enhanced work identification.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are proposed to facilitate the effective utilization of overqualified employees, strengthen work identification, promote constructive deviant behavior, and enhance innovation capability and sustainable organizational development in high-tech SMEs.

Adopt a capability-oriented management approach. Organizations should regard employees with perceived overqualification as strategic human capital rather than as a source of person–job mismatch. By providing challenging assignments, job enrichment, career development opportunities, and cross-functional collaboration, organizations can better utilize employees' surplus knowledge, skills, and abilities while maximizing their innovation potential.

Strengthen multi-level work identification. Organizations should enhance employees' self-identification, team identification, and

Organizational identification through fair recognition, supportive leadership, effective communication, collaborative work, and value alignment. Strengthening work identification will encourage employees to transform their surplus capabilities into constructive behaviors that benefit both colleagues and the organization.

Create an innovation-supportive organizational environment. Organizations should establish management systems that encourage knowledge sharing,

Tolerate reasonable risk-taking, recognize constructive innovation, and strengthen organizational learning. Such an environment can motivate employees to engage in constructive deviant behavior while continuously improving organizational innovation capability and competitiveness.

Improve regional talent governance. Government agencies should optimize talent allocation mechanisms and strengthen innovation-support policies, and promote collaboration among universities, research institutes, and enterprises. These initiatives can improve the effective utilization of highly qualified talent and support the sustainable development of high-tech SMEs and regional innovation ecosystems.

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