

Perceived overqualification and employee outcomes: The dual pathways and the moderating effects of dual-focused transformational leadership

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Abstract

Research findings concerning the effects of perceived overqualification on task performance are mixed. To reconcile the disparate findings, drawing on person-environment theory, we propose cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance as contrasting dual pathways that explain the negative and positive effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity. We also examine the moderating effects of dual-focused transformational leadership (TFL) on the relationships between perceived overqualification and the two mediating mechanisms. We test this model using data collected from 469 employees and their 135 supervisors via two-wave surveys. The results support the negative and positive mediating mechanisms. In addition, based on one field study and two online experiments, we find that individual-focused TFL mitigates the relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job, but that team-focused TFL enhances the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance.

KEYWORDS

constructive deviance, cynicism toward the job, employee creativity, perceived overqualification, task performance, transformational leadership

1 | INTRODUCTION

Perceived overqualification—a situation where an employee's qualifications (i.e., education, skills, and work experience) exceed the requirements of his/her job (Maynard et al., 2006)—is a widespread phenomenon (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Harari et al., 2017; van Dijk et al., 2020). For instance, according to the International Labour Organization (2018), approximately 20% of employees feel overqualified for their present jobs. Scholars have linked perceived overqualification to a variety of negative employee outcomes, such as poor organizational commitment, greater strain, and increased counterproductive

behaviors (Harari et al., 2017; Luksyte et al., 2011; Maynard et al., 2006). However, emerging research has discerned that overqualified employees may not always react adversely. Indeed, there are mixed findings on the effects of perceived overqualification on employees' task performance (for a review, refer to Erdogan & Bauer, 2021). Moreover, perceived overqualification has been found to be positively associated with employee creativity and proactive behavior (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Lin et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016, 2021).

Recently, several scholars have employed dual pathways to explain both positive and negative effects of perceived

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overqualification on task performance. For instance, using a motivation-based or a capability-based explanation, Lee et al. (2021) proposed and demonstrated that task mastery mediated the positive effect of perceived overqualification on task performance, but relative deprivation did not significantly explain the negative effect of perceived overqualification on supervisor-rated task performance. On the other hand, based on person-environment (P-E) fit literature (Edwards et al., 1998), Debus et al. (2023) showed that anger toward employment situation, as a strain-based reaction, explained the negative impact of perceived overqualification on task performance, but work organization (i.e., a form of structural job crafting), as a self-regulatory reaction, did not explicate the positive effect of perceived overqualification on task performance.

Although these studies have advanced our understanding on the positive and negative effects of perceived overqualification on employee outcomes, both studies paid little attention to overqualified employees' efforts to resolve person-job misfit. Overqualification literature (e.g., Debus et al., 2023; Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Liu et al., 2015; Luksyte et al., 2011; Zhao & Ma, 2023) has noted that perceived overqualification denotes person-job misfit, a type of complementary misfit, where employees' abilities, qualifications, and needs exceed what their jobs demand from them and provide them. To resolve such person-job misfit, individuals have two main adjustment tactics (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Follmer et al., 2018): defense—subjectively changing their perceptions of person or environment—and coping—changing the objective person or the objective environment. Extrapolating from this argument, we expect that overqualified employees, as a defense adjustment, can change their perceptions toward their jobs (Maynard et al., 2006). Meanwhile, overqualified employees can try to change the objective environment to reduce person-job misfit as a coping tactic. Given that overqualified employees have the potential to use their surplus abilities to change the environment proactively to create a better future for themselves (Follmer et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2010), understanding how proactive behaviors of overqualified employees can contribute to task performance is critical. Furthermore, the extant research did not examine the dual pathways through which perceived overqualification affects employee creativity, which remains an important gap in the literature and is worthy of addressing (Debus et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021).

To address the foregoing issues, we first examine a dual pathway model which proposes that overqualified employees involve different efforts to resolve such person-job misfit. Specifically, we consider cynicism toward the job as a defense pathway (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998) that can subjectively change overqualified employees' perceptions of their job to resolve person-job misfit. Cynicism toward the job refers to employees' lack of enthusiasm and sense of job meaningfulness in their job (Luksyte et al., 2011; Schaufeli et al., 1996) that can manifest negative emotions and disillusionment (Dean Jr. et al., 1998). Employees who perceive that they possess abilities exceeding the job requirements may distance themselves emotionally and cognitively from their jobs (Maslach, 2003; Naus et al., 2007). Such cynical perceptions may, in turn, be detrimental to

their subsequent work outcomes (e.g., task performance and employee creativity, Chiaburu et al., 2013; Naseer et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, we focus on constructive deviance as a coping pathway (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998) that involves overqualified employees' efforts to resolve person-job misfit by changing the objective environment. Constructive deviance refers to voluntary behaviors that deviate from the organization's prescribed routines and norms with the individual's intent to benefit the organization or its stakeholders (Galperin, 2012). Employees who engage in constructive deviance exhibit a high level of self-initiative, an essential attribute of proactivity (Parker et al., 2010), and voluntarily go beyond their requisite responsibilities to benefit the organization (Dahling et al., 2012). When feeling overqualified, employees may try to change the objective environment by taking positive control of the situation to resolve the perceived person-job misfit. Such constructive deviance brings functional changes to the job and organization (Galperin, 2003, 2012; Mertens et al., 2016), which can explain why overqualified employees perform well in their job and are more creative.

Next, and perhaps more importantly, we further attempt to resolve the mixed findings on the effects of perceived overqualification on employee outcomes, investigating a boundary condition that either strengthens or weakens the impact of each pathway. According to P-E theory (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), contextual factors, especially leadership, can play important roles in employees' approaches for dealing with their person-job misfit, including perceived overqualification (Ma, Ganegoda, et al., 2020; Ma, Lin, & Wei, 2020). Effective leaders can induce desirable follower abilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and adjust their behaviors in light of followers' characteristics (Riggio et al., 2008). In the context of P-E fit, several scholars (e.g., Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lambert et al., 2012; Tepper et al., 2018) have noted that transformational leadership (TFL) provides important environmental resources to employees to improve utilization of their abilities and skills. Thus, we theorize and test how TFL influences overqualified employees' efforts to resolve their person-job misfit.

Despite the aforementioned argument, we expect that the environmental resources that TFL supplies do not have the same impact on overqualified employees' different adjustments to perceived overqualification (cf. Koo & Lee, 2021). Leadership scholars (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Wang & Howell, 2010) have noted that distinguishing between leading individuals (i.e., individual-focused TFL) versus leading the team as a whole (i.e., team-focused TFL) is critical. Specifically, individual-focused TFL tends to provide customized support to followers by understanding their unique needs and developing their potential. Leaders displaying individual-focused TFL provide overqualified employees with a favorable environment that helps them achieve personal goals and develop (Dong et al., 2017). In such circumstances, overqualified employees are less likely to have cynicism toward the job owing to their leader's supportive behaviors toward them as individuals. In contrast, team-focused TFL aims to develop shared values and beliefs and direct attention to the needs of the entire team, emphasizing a collective identity rather than centering on the individual (Chun et al., 2016; Kark & Shamir, 2002). Leaders manifesting

team-focused TFL encourage and support team members in their efforts to attain the collective goals (Kark & Shamir, 2002; Wang & Howell, 2010). In such instances, overqualified employees integrate the collective's interests and goals with their own; accordingly, they are more apt to engage in constructive deviance that benefits the collective (e.g., team and organization) or its stakeholders.

In sum, we develop and test a dual pathway model whereby perceived overqualification is linked to task performance and employee creativity negatively and positively via cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance. Understanding the mechanisms through which perceived overqualification affects employee creativity merits empirical attention (Debus et al., 2023; Erdogan et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021). In doing so, we contribute to overqualification and P-E literatures by identifying overqualified employees' efforts to resolve person-job misfit. In addition, our investigating dual-focused TFL as a boundary condition responds to van Dijk et al.'s (2020) call for further research into the conditions under which the positive side of overqualification is more likely to be realized. Insights into these boundary conditions can also help managers improve their apprehension of how to encourage overqualified employees to perform well. Finally, we test our research model using multiple methods (i.e., a field study and two scenario-based experiments), which provide evidence of the causality implied in the research hypotheses and enhance the internal validity of our study.

2 | THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | P-E fit and perceived overqualification

Overqualification scholars (e.g., Liu et al., 2015; Luksyte et al., 2011; Maynard et al., 2006) have applied P-E fit theory to study the impact of perceived overqualification on employee outcomes. P-E fit refers to the compatibility that occurs when individual and work environment characteristics are matched (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Research has shown that perceived overqualification involves person-job misfit in which employee's capabilities exceed their job demands, and their needs are not adequately fulfilled (Debus et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2015; Luksyte et al., 2011). Person-job misfit generally leads to negative consequences for employees (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Consistent with this line of research, the overqualification literature has examined negative reactions to perceived overqualification (i.e., person-job misfit) and its detrimental outcomes. For example, employees who perceive themselves to be overqualified may experience negative affect and anger toward employment situation, thereby ending up with poor task performance (Debus et al., 2023; Erdogan et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2015). Furthermore, employees who view themselves as overqualified have been found to be more likely to develop negative work attitudes (e.g., higher turnover intention, lower job satisfaction, less organizational commitment), experience poor well-being, and engage in counterproductive work behaviors (for a review, see Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Harari et al., 2017). However, some scholars have revealed that overqualified

employees who have additional skills and knowledge are likely to perform better in their job with a higher task mastery (Lee et al., 2021) and using a variety of adjustment methods such as job crafting (e.g., Lin et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). Meanwhile, there are some investigations that have observed a nonsignificant relationship between perceived overqualification and employee task performance and creativity (Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Harari et al., 2017; van Dijk et al., 2020).

Despite the informative nature of these studies, the extant studies have overlooked the potential effects of overqualified employees' efforts to resolve person-job misfit. According to P-E fit literature (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Follmer et al., 2018), individuals may take two sets of adjustive tactics to resolve person-job misfit. One is a defense adjustment; it entails subjectively change their perceptions of person or environment. The other is a coping adjustment; individuals invest more effort in changing the objective person or environment to resolve the misfit. Next, we discuss how cynicism toward the job, as a defense adjustment, and constructive deviance, as a coping adjustment, can explain the positive and negative indirect effects of perceived overqualification (i.e., person-job misfit) on task performance and employee creativity.

2.1.1 | Mediating role of cynicism toward the job

We propose that perceived overqualification will trigger employees' cynicism toward their job.¹ According to P-E fit literature (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998), employees with high perceived overqualification may choose to subjectively change their perceptions of environment (i.e., defense) to resolve person-job misfit. For instance, overqualified employees may downplay the importance and significance of their job to resolve person-job misfit (Liu & Wang, 2012; Luksyte et al., 2011), thereby becoming more cynical toward their job. In a similar vein, previous research has demonstrated that a person-job misfit can make it difficult for employees to derive meaningfulness from their current job (e.g., cynicism; Edwards et al., 1998; Tong et al., 2015).

Cynicism toward the job can, in turn, negatively influence task performance and employee creativity. Those employees with high cynicism toward the job feel that their jobs are unable to reward their extra efforts fairly (Chiaburu et al., 2013). Accordingly, they may believe that their job does not merit their engaging in extensive work effort; as such, they might become less willing to do what is necessary to complete assigned tasks (Kim et al., 2009). Individuals with high cynicism toward the job are also less likely to invest their time, energy,

¹Cynicism toward the job is similar to, but somewhat different from, job dissatisfaction, which is an "evaluative judgment one makes about one's job or job situation" (Weiss, 2002, p. 175). In addition to various negative attitudes toward the job (i.e., job dissatisfaction), cynicism toward the job comprises lack of enthusiasm and sense of job meaningfulness (Luksyte et al., 2011; Schaufeli et al., 1996), often arising from disillusionment and frustration with organizational processes (Abraham, 2000). Additionally, employees' reactions to job dissatisfaction can vary, such as through their leaving the job (exit), trying to change the situation (voice), waiting patiently and hoping the problem will resolve itself (loyalty), or engaging in lax and disregardful behavior (neglect, Farrell, 1983); cynicism toward the job, however, tends to result in negative outcomes (Kim et al., 2009; Naseer et al., 2020).

and attention in maintaining interpersonal relationships in the workplace, hence reducing their ability to gather diverse job-related information (Naseer et al., 2020). Lack of such job-related information will likely decrease their task performance and creativity. Moreover, employees with cynicism toward the job who feel less enthusiasm and sense of meaningfulness in their job are less likely eager to master the rules of the work system and may conceive that acquisition of new job-related knowledge and the search for new solutions that are beneficial to their organizations are a waste of their time (Chiaburu et al., 2013), which is detrimental to their task performance and creativity. Taken together, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Perceived overqualification has a negative indirect effect on (a) task performance and (b) employee creativity through cynicism toward the job.

2.1.2 | Mediating role of constructive deviance

We propose that perceived overqualification will boost employees' constructive deviance. According to the P-E fit literature (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Follmer et al., 2018), to reduce person-job misfit (e.g., perceived overqualification, Erdogan & Bauer, 2021; Liu et al., 2015), overqualified employees may also try to change the objective environment. Constructive deviance seemingly might afford this type of adjustment to person-job misfit. For instance, overqualified employees can make their work environment more favorable to them by deviating from the organization's prescribed routines and norms to benefit the organization (i.e., engaging in constructive deviance, Deng et al., 2018). Furthermore, overqualified employees may be good at engaging in constructive deviance because they possess more capabilities and qualifications than their job requires; as such, they are competent in executing broader and proactive roles (Zhang et al., 2016). Undertaking constructive behaviors can also lead overqualified employees to be more likely to experience a positive self and feelings of mastery (Vadera et al., 2013). Therefore, we expect that employees who perceive themselves to be overqualified may be more prone to engage in constructive deviance.

Constructive deviance is, in turn, positively related to employees' task performance and creativity. Constructive deviance focuses on positive processes and practices for promoting effective functioning of the organization (Galperin, 2012; Mertens et al., 2016). In doing so, employees can analyze existing problems and gain access to diverse sources of information that encompass a deep knowledge of existing organizational processes and norms, which can help them generate solutions to their tasks efficiently and effectively (Mertens et al., 2016). Constructive deviance is beneficial for two major reasons. First, it provides an important basis for organizational change and growth (Mertens et al., 2016). Second, it offers employees opportunities to utilize their abilities to find creative solutions to challenges at work and to contribute to improving the work environment (Galperin, 2003, 2012). Indeed, Mertens et al. (2016) showed that

employees who actively engage in constructive deviance increased efficiency and served their customers with enhanced effectiveness. Also, in the face of unanticipated organizational and customer problems, constructive deviants may see problems from different and unconventional perspectives and deviate from established routines to enhance organizational efficiency, thereby achieving ameliorated task performance and employee creativity (e.g., providing customers with extra service; Mainemelis, 2010; Vadera et al., 2013). Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Perceived overqualification has a positive indirect effect on (a) task performance and (b) employee creativity through constructive deviance.

2.1.3 | Relative importance of constructive deviance and cynicism toward the job

The general hypothesis of “bad is stronger than good” (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001) suggests that negative events are more powerful than positive events on cognition and motivation, complex human information processing, and emotional responses. Specifically, Baumeister et al. (2001) proposed that individuals who respond to bad events more strongly than good events would be more likely to survive and reproduce. Compared to positive information, negative information is also processed more systematically and thoroughly, thus contributing to impression formation (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). Extrapolating from these arguments, we expect that cynicism toward the job is a negative stimulus that may have greater influence on employee outcomes than constructive deviance.

However, according to control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Johnson et al., 2006), when individuals fail to achieve desired goals, they tend to experience negative affective reactions, but such reactions are ephemeral. People control their activities (e.g., collecting other sources of information) until they achieve desired goals. As a result, cynicism toward the job—as a defense pathway in employees' response to perceived overqualification—will likely affect employee outcomes less than will constructive deviance as a coping pathway. Owing to the foregoing opposing predictions derived from different theoretical perspectives, we offer the following research question:

Research Question: Does constructive deviance or cynicism toward the job explain the linkage between perceived overqualification and employee task performance/creativity more strongly?

2.1.4 | Moderating effects of dual-focused TFL

According to the P-E fit literature (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013), individuals' efforts to resolve P-E misfit vary owing to contextual factors, such as environmental resources and constraints. Among environmental resources, drawing on previous studies (Lambert et al., 2012; Tepper et al., 2018), we propose that TFL (i.e., a resource) can serve as a

critical boundary condition. Using a P-E fit perspective, Lambert et al. (2012) conceptualized leadership behavior as an environmental resource or support that subordinates can use to satisfy their psychological needs. Tepper et al. (2018) suggested that high levels of TFL supply the resources necessary to satisfy followers' psychological needs and other fundamental needs (e.g., intrinsic motivation, Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006). In our study, however, we expect that the environmental resources TFL supplies may not yield the same impact on overqualified employees' adjustments to a person-job misfit when they attend to different foci (i.e., individual vs. the collective).

Leadership scholars (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Wang & Howell, 2010) have proposed the dual-focused model of TFL, distinguishing between team- and individual-focused TFL. Team-focused TFL regards two dimensions of leader behaviors that are directed toward a team as a whole: idealized influence and inspirational motivation. Idealized influence refers to leader behaviors that encourage followers to prioritize the achievement of a collective goal (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Chun et al., 2016). Inspirational motivation involves behavior with which a leader inspires his/her team to achieve ambitious goals and visions (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Chun et al., 2016). Individual-focused TFL, though, entails, leader behavior that provides followers with customized mentoring, pays attention to followers' unique needs (i.e., individualized consideration), and encourages individual followers to question assumptions and to think about problems in new ways (i.e., intellectual stimulation) (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Chun et al., 2016). Owing to the foregoing differences between team and individual-focused TFL, we propose the distinctive moderating roles of team- and individual-focused TFL: individual-focused TFL moderates the relationships between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job while team-focused TFL moderates the relationships between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance.

2.2 | Moderating role of individual-focused TFL

We propose that individual-focused TFL will mitigate the negative effect of perceived overqualification on cynicism toward the job. For instance, a leader using individual-focused TFL—through individualized consideration—gives heed to employees' discomfort and provides them with personalized support and solutions for attending to their problems at work (Klaic et al., 2018). On such occasions, employees who feel overqualified experience a more desirable work situation that can buffer the negative impact of perceived overqualification on defense adjustment (i.e., cynicism toward the job here). Moreover, through intellectual stimulation, leaders actuate overqualified followers to think about solutions from different perspectives and to engage in skill development (Dong et al., 2017). Experiencing such leadership behavior will lead overqualified employees to be motivated to utilize their surplus skills and abilities, which may reduce their cynical thoughts about their job. Therefore, individual-focused TFL that recognizes employees' individual distinctiveness and development and

allows them sufficient latitude can buffer the negative reactions or adjustments from overqualified employees. Thus, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. Individual-focused TFL moderates the relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job, such that this relationship will be weaker when individual-focused TFL is higher rather than lower.

2.3 | Moderating role of team-focused TFL

On the other hand, we expect that team-focused TFL will enhance the positive relationship between overqualification and constructive deviance. Team-focused transformational leaders express high expectations for team members via inspirational motivation (Kim et al., 2022). Also, they encourage their team members to transcend their personal interests for the collective's goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Such leader behavior enhances the status of the group in the minds of employees (Wang & Howell, 2010) and encourages them to engage in pro-organizational actions (Chun et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2022). Moreover, when leaders emphasize collective vision and encourage their team members to pursue a collective goal, employees tend to internalize collective interests and values into their own interests and values (Chi & Pan, 2012). Accordingly, employees may evaluate their behavior and competencies in the context of the group and invest their time and efforts to contribute to the collective's overall well-being (Kark & Shamir, 2002). Team-focused TFL also accords with constructive deviance, as it aims to “contribute to the well-being of an organization, its members, or both” (Galperin, 2003, p. 158). As a result, working with leaders who emphasize team-focused TFL, overqualified employees may be more prone to use their surplus skills and knowledge to engage in constructive deviance that can enhance the well-being of the collective (e.g., team, organization). These arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. Team-focused TFL moderates the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance, such that this relationship is stronger when team-focused TFL is higher rather than lower.

2.4 | A conditional indirect model

The preceding discussion and research hypotheses suggest a series of *conditional indirect* models, as shown in Figure 1. Specifically, we propose that individual-focused TFL mitigates the indirect relationship between perceived overqualification and employee outcomes via cynicism toward the job. Furthermore, we posit that team-focused TFL augments the indirect effect of perceived overqualification on employee outcomes via constructive deviance. Therefore, we offer the following hypotheses:

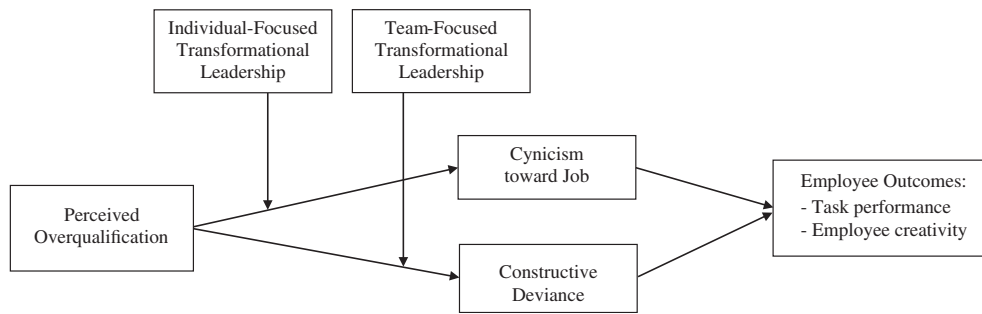


FIGURE 1 Research model linking perceived overqualification to employee outcomes.

Hypothesis 5. Individual-focused TFL moderates the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on (a) task performance and (b) employee creativity via cynicism toward the job, such that the indirect effects are weaker when individual-focused TFL is higher rather than lower.

Hypothesis 6. Team-focused TFL moderates the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on (a) task performance and (b) employee creativity via constructive deviance, such that the indirect effects are stronger when team-focused TFL is higher rather than lower.

3 | OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

To test our research hypotheses, we conducted one field study (Study 1) and two online experiments (Study 2). Study 1 used multisource (i.e., supervisors and their employees) data and multi-wave field surveys to test the full proposed model. Study 2 involved two scenario-based experiments to demonstrate the causal effects of overqualification and individual- and team-focused TFL on cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance. Study 2 manipulated overqualification, as well as individual- and team-focused TFL, to demonstrate their causal effects on constructive deviance and cynicism toward the job. These multi-methods provide compelling evidence for the causal effects of overqualification on employee outcomes and the moderating effects of individual- and team-focused TFL.

3.1 | Study 1: A field survey

3.1.1 | Sample and procedure

Data were collected from 469 employees and 135 supervisors working in 30 organizations. They were chosen from MBA alumni of a business school located in central China. We first contacted the executives in these organizations, and they agreed to participate in our study. The organizations were all in knowledge-intensive industries: finance (3), services (10), information technology (6), transportation and construction (4), and manufacturing (7). Employees in

these kinds of organizations tend to have a higher level of education, skill, and work experience and are, therefore, appropriate for studying perceived overqualification. Human resource managers at these organizations compiled a list of 150 stable and long-term working groups that represented the smallest functional unit in the organization and in which employees reported directly to the same supervisor. The primary responsibilities of the employees in these working groups were to develop and use their knowledge rather than to produce or provide goods or services in various functional groups—such as research and development, sales, project management, or customer service. Subordinates with the same supervisor constituted a group.

To reduce potential common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012), we adopted a two-wave design and collected our data from multiple sources: employees and their supervisors. At time 1, we asked employees to rate their perceived overqualification, rate their supervisor's TFL behaviors, and report their demographic information (i.e., age, gender, and organizational tenure). At time 2 (approximately 3 months later), those employees who responded to the first survey were asked to complete another survey that focused on their cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance. We also asked the supervisors to assess their employees' task performance and creativity in the Time 2 questionnaire.

We distributed questionnaires to 700 employees and 150 supervisors. At time 1, 556 employee questionnaires were returned (response rate = 79.4%). At time 2, 501 employees completed the survey (response rate = 71.6%), and 139 supervisors reported their employees' task performance and creativity (response rate = 92.7%). After deleting missing data and matching employee and supervisor questionnaires, we eventually obtained 469 usable matched responses. Among these 469 employees, 50.3% were male, the average age was 30.0 years ($SD = 5.0$), and mean organizational tenure was 4.1 years ($SD = 3.8$). Also, 4.3% of respondents had a high school education or less; 20.0%, an associate's degree; 60.3%, a bachelor's degree; and 15.4%, a master's degree or above.

3.1.2 | Measures

Questionnaires were administered in Chinese. We followed a back-translation procedure to confirm the accuracy of the translation from English to Chinese (Brislin, 1970). Unless otherwise specified, all

measures were evaluated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

Perceived overqualification

We measured perceived overqualification using Maynard et al.'s (2006) 9-item scale. Sample items are, “My job requires less education than I have,” “I have more abilities than I need in order to do my job,” and “My education level is above the education level required by my job” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$).

Cynicism toward the job

Cynicism toward the job was assessed using four items chosen from the scale developed from Schaufeli et al. (1996). In line with a previous study that examined the validity of MBI-GS for the Chinese context (Li & Shi, 2003), we chose to exclude one item, “I just want to do my job and not be bothered.” The four items also had the highest factor loadings in our pilot study. A sample item is, “I have become less enthusiastic about my job” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$).

Constructive deviance

We used Galperin's (2012) 10-item scale to measure constructive deviance. A sample item is, “I have disagreed with others in my work group in order to improve the current work procedures” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$).

Task performance

Supervisors rated their employees' task performance using the 5-item scale from Williams and Anderson (1991). A sample item is, “This employee adequately completes assigned duties” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).

Employee creativity

Supervisors rated their employees' creativity using De Clercq et al.'s (2017) 3-item scale. A sample item is, “This employee often creates new ideas for improvement” (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$).

Dual-focused TFL

We measured team- and individual-focused TFL using the multifactor leadership questionnaire from Bass and Avolio (1997). In line with the dual-focused TFL conceptualization (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Kim et al., 2022), we assessed team-focused TFL, adapting 12 items from the idealized influence—including two subdimensions (i.e., “attributed” and “behavior”)—and inspirational motivation subscales. We measured individual-focused TFL, adapting eight items from the intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration subscales. A sample item for team-focused TFL is, “Emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission.” A sample item for individual-focused TFL is, “Considers me as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others.”

Given that our data were nested within working groups, we performed multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to test whether our dual-focused TFL measurement model fit the data. Specifically, we assessed the measurement model in a second-order manner. Results highlighted the good fit of the dual-focused TFL model to the

data ($\chi^2(179) = 344.76$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.97, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.04, and square root mean residuals (SRMR) within-level = 0.05; SRMR between-level = 0.08). As such, the team- and individual-focused TFL measures were distinct from each other.

Following the literature (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2022), we averaged all items at the individual and team levels to generate an overall score for the individual- and team-focused TFL scales, respectively. In addition, we calculated $r_{wg(i)}$ and the intraclass correlations (ICCs, Bliese, 2000) to determine the suitability of aggregating the team-focused TFL items at the team level. The mean $r_{wg(i)}$ was 0.98, the ICC (1) was 0.51 ($F = 4.65$, $p < 0.001$), and the ICC (2) was 0.78. These findings suggested that the aggregation of the individual ratings of the team-focused TFL could be aggregated as a team-level construct (LeBreton & Senter, 2008).

Control variables

At the individual level, because of their potential relationships with constructive deviance and task performance, we controlled for gender, age, education level, and organizational tenure (Ma, Lin, & Wei, 2020; Vadera et al., 2013). At the supervisor level, given its potential impact on employee creativity, we controlled for team size (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). In addition, we repeated all hypothesis tests both with and without the control variables to ensure that the results remained largely unchanged, which would lend support to the robustness of the findings.

3.1.3 | Analytical approach

Given that our data were nested within supervisors, we conducted multilevel analyses to test our hypotheses. Specifically, we conducted path analysis (M1) using Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017) to examine our proposed main and indirect effects. Then, we undertook another path analysis (M2) to examine the moderating effects of dual-level TFL. For the interaction effect, we used grand-mean centering for the level 2 moderator and group-mean centering for the level 1 predictor and moderator (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). We also drew simple slopes at $\pm 1SD$ from the mean of individual- and team-focused TFL for the significant interaction effects. We calculated the confidence intervals (CIs) by following the Monte Carlo simulation procedure with 20,000 replications to examine the indirect and conditional indirect effects (Preacher & Selig, 2012).

3.1.4 | Results

Because we collected data from supervisors who had rated multiple subordinates' task performance and creativity, we first used within and between analysis (WABA; Dansereau et al., 1984) to test the assumption of independence among the ratings that each supervisor provided for multiple subordinates. *F* tests for task performance and

creativity were less than 1.0 (E-ratio = 0.88; E-ratio = 0.85, respectively), and *F* tests computed for task performance and creativity were also not significant. The WABA results suggested that analyzing the supervisor ratings at the individual level was appropriate.

We conducted CFAs with the key variables in our model (i.e., perceived overqualification, cynicism toward the job, constructive deviance, task performance, employee creativity, and team- and individual-focused leadership). Specifically, we conducted two-level CFAs and found that the seven-factor model had a good fit to the data (χ^2 (493) = 826.02, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR within-level = 0.04, SRMR between-level = 0.09, and CFI = 0.96). This model demonstrated a better fit than an alternative six-factor model that combined task performance and employee creativity (χ^2 (504) = 1385.11, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR within-level = 0.09, SRMR between-level = 0.22, and CFI = 0.90). Another six-factor model that combined constructive deviance and employee creativity also provided a weaker fit to the data (χ^2 (504) = 1620.91, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR within-level = 0.13, SRMR between-level = 0.19, and CFI = 0.89). Overall, these results confirmed that the measures assessed in this study were distinct.

Presented in Table 1 are the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Perceived overqualification was not significantly correlated with task performance ($r = -0.05$, *n.s.*) nor employee creativity ($r = -0.01$, *n.s.*). It was, though, significantly correlated with both cynicism toward the job ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$) and constructive deviance ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$).

As shown in Table 2, perceived overqualification was positively related to cynicism toward the job ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$), and cynicism toward the job was negatively associated with task performance ($\beta = -0.13$, $p < 0.001$) and employee creativity ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, Monte Carlo simulation results revealed that the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through cynicism toward the job were both negative and significant (indirect effect = -0.02 , 95% CI = $[-0.052, -0.008]$; indirect effect = -0.02 , 95% CI = $[-0.048, -0.006]$, respectively). These results supported Hypothesis 1a and 1b.

Perceived overqualification was positively related to constructive deviance ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), and constructive deviance was positively associated with task performance ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$) and employee creativity ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, Monte Carlo simulation results showed that the indirect effect of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through constructive deviance were both significant (indirect effect = 0.03 , 95% CI = $[0.008, 0.060]$; indirect effect = 0.05 , 95% CI = $[0.019, 0.087]$, respectively). These results confirmed Hypothesis 2a and 2b.

In addition, we tested the relative importance of constructive deviance and cynicism toward the job as a mediator for the relationship between perceived overqualification and employee task performance and creativity. Results showed that the difference in the effects of cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance on task performance was not significant (difference = 0.00 , 95% CI = $[-0.123, 0.119]$). However, the effect of constructive deviance on employee creativity was significantly larger than that of cynicism

toward the job on employee creativity (difference = 0.09 , 95% CI = $[0.004, 0.206]$). Accordingly, the difference between the two indirect effects on task performance was not significant (difference = 0.01 , 95% CI = $[-0.030, 0.041]$), but the difference between the two indirect effects on employee creativity was significant (difference = 0.03 , 95% CI = $[0.005, 0.073]$).

Hypothesis 3 stated that individual-focused TFL would moderate the relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job. As shown in Table 3, the interaction term between perceived overqualification and individual-focused TFL on cynicism toward the job was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < 0.05$). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, perceived overqualification was not significantly related to cynicism toward the job when individual-focused TFL was higher (simple slope = -0.13 , *n.s.*), but this relationship was significant when individual-focused TFL was lower (simple slope = 0.45 , $p < 0.01$). These simple slopes are presented in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that team-focused TFL would moderate the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance. As depicted in Table 3, there was a positive interaction effect between team-focused TFL and perceived overqualification on constructive deviance ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). The simple slope test showed that the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance was positive and significant when team-focused TFL was higher (simple slope = 0.36 , $p < 0.001$), but the relationship was not significant when team-focused TFL was lower (simple slope = 0.01 , *n.s.*). These simple slopes are presented in Figure 3. These results supported Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5a and 5b posited that individual-focused TFL would moderate the indirect effect of perceived overqualification on employee task performance and employee creativity via cynicism toward the job. The results revealed that the indirect effect of overqualification on task performance via cynicism toward the job was significant when individual-focused TFL was lower (indirect effect = -0.06 , 95% CI = $[-0.133, -0.013]$). It was not significant, though, when individual-focused TFL was higher (indirect effect = 0.02 , 95% CI = $[-0.019, 0.067]$). In addition, the indirect effect of overqualification on employee creativity via cynicism toward the job was significant when individual-focused TFL was lower (indirect effect = -0.08 , 95% CI = $[-0.160, -0.018]$), but it was not significant when individual-focused TFL was higher (indirect effect = 0.02 , 95% CI = $[-0.024, 0.083]$). These results confirmed Hypothesis 5a and 5b.

Hypothesis 6a and 6b proposed that team-focused TFL would moderate the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through constructive deviance. The indirect effect of perceived overqualification on task performance through constructive deviance was significant when team-focused TFL was higher (indirect effect = 0.05 , 95% CI = $[0.009, 0.112]$). It was not significant, though, when team-focused TFL was lower (indirect effect = -0.01 , 95% CI = $[-0.041, 0.021]$). Also, the moderating effect of team-focused TFL on the indirect relationship between perceived overqualification and employee creativity via constructive deviance was significant when team-focused TFL was higher (indirect

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables (Study 1).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Team-level														
1 Team size	3.66	1.02	-											
2 Team-focused TFL	5.19	0.76	-0.15**	-										
Individual-level														
1 Age	30.02	5.02	-											
2 Gender	0.50	0.50	-0.05	-										
3 Education level	3.87	0.72	0.07	0.00	-									
4 Organizational tenure	4.12	3.80	0.67**	0.04	0.02	-								
5 Perceived overqualification	3.98	1.07	-0.14**	-0.06	-0.03	-0.17**	-							
6 Cynicism toward the job	3.13	1.32	0.05	0.00	0.10*	-0.03	0.15**	-						
7 Constructive deviance	4.36	0.97	0.12	-0.11**	0.08	0.12**	0.23**	0.00	-					
8 Individual-focused TFL	5.01	1.09	0.09*	-0.04	0.00	0.03	-0.02	-0.20**	0.07	-				
9 Task performance	5.29	0.95	0.11*	-0.03	0.12*	0.14**	-0.05	-0.17**	0.15**	0.11*	-			
10 Employee creativity	5.06	1.05	0.10*	0.00	0.00	0.08	-0.01	-0.14*	0.19**	0.10*	0.52**	-		
11 Incremental creativity	4.71	1.03	-0.01	-0.02	0.03	0.06	0.08	-0.09*	0.35**	0.11**	0.08	0.10**	-	
12 Radical creativity	4.72	1.06	0.03	-0.09*	0.07	0.06	0.13**	-0.16**	0.57**	0.15**	0.14**	0.18**	0.61**	-

Note: N = 135 for team-level data, N = 469 for individual-level data. TFL = transformational leadership; gender: 0 = male; 1 = female.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 2 Main effects and mediating effects (Study 1).

	Cynicism toward the job		Constructive deviance		Task performance		Employee creativity	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Age	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.01
Gender	0.04	0.12	-0.19**	0.09	-0.04	0.08	0.05	0.09
Education level	0.17	0.08	0.11	0.06	0.16**	0.05	-0.01	0.07
Organizational tenure	-0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.02
Perceived overqualification	0.19**	0.06	0.23***	0.04	-0.03	0.04	-0.02	0.05
Cynicism toward the job					-0.13***	0.04	-0.11**	0.04
Constructive deviance					0.13**	0.05	0.20**	0.06

Note: $N = 469$. Path coefficients are unstandardized estimates.

** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE 3 Moderating effects of dual-focused TFL (Study 1).

	Cynicism toward the job		Constructive deviance		Task performance		Employee creativity	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Within-level								
Age	0.05*	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03*	0.01
Gender	0.05	0.10	-0.20*	0.10	-0.01	0.07	0.15	0.09
Education level	0.13	0.12	0.03	0.08	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.09
Organizational tenure	-0.03	0.02	0.04*	0.02	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02
Perceived overqualification (POQ)	0.16*	0.07	0.19**	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.00	0.08
Individual-focused TFL	-0.21**	0.07	0.10*	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05
Individual-focused TFL \times POQ	-0.27*	0.11	-0.02	0.08	-0.02	0.07	0.07	0.10
Cynicism toward the job					-0.14**	0.05	-0.17**	0.06
Constructive deviance					0.12*	0.05	0.19*	0.08
Between-level								
Control variables								
Team size	0.04	0.07	-0.08*	0.04	-0.14	0.10	-0.10	0.08
Team-focused TFL	-0.16	0.13	0.14	0.07	-0.12**	0.04	-0.39**	0.05
Team-focused TFL \times POQ	0.10	0.12	0.23**	0.09	-0.13	0.07	-0.08	0.06

Note: $N = 135$ for team-level data, $N = 469$ for individual-level data. Path coefficients are unstandardized estimates.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

effect = 0.08, 95% CI = [0.013, 0.177]). It was not significant, however, when team-focused TFL was lower (indirect effect = -0.01, 95% CI = [-0.065, 0.034]). These results lent support to Hypothesis 6a and 6b.

3.1.5 | Supplementary analyses

As supplementary analyses, we tested whether individual-focused TFL moderated the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance and whether team-focused TFL moderated the relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job. The results in Table 3 revealed that the interaction

term between perceived overqualification and individual-focused TFL on constructive deviance was not significant ($\beta = -0.02$, *n.s.*), and the interaction effect between team-focused TFL and perceived overqualification on cynicism toward the job was not significant ($\beta = 0.10$, *n.s.*).

In addition, given that Galperin's (2012) scale consists of two dimensions (i.e., organizational deviance and interpersonal deviance), we conducted supplemental analyses to compare between the effects of the two components. Results show that the relationships between perceived overqualification and interpersonal and organizational deviance were both significant ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$, respectively). Meanwhile, the relationships between organizational deviance and task performance and employee creativity were

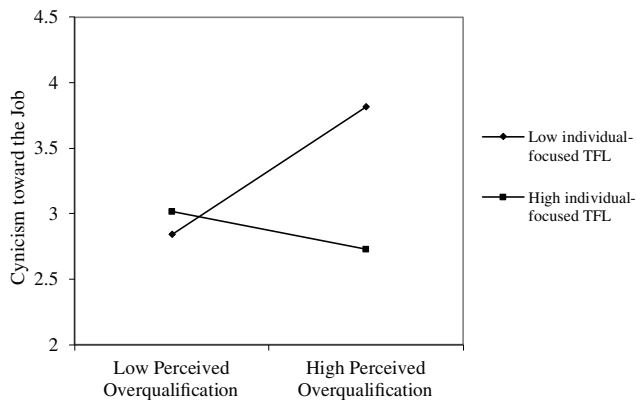


FIGURE 2 Simple slope of the relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance at levels of individual-focused transformational leadership (TFL) (Study 1).

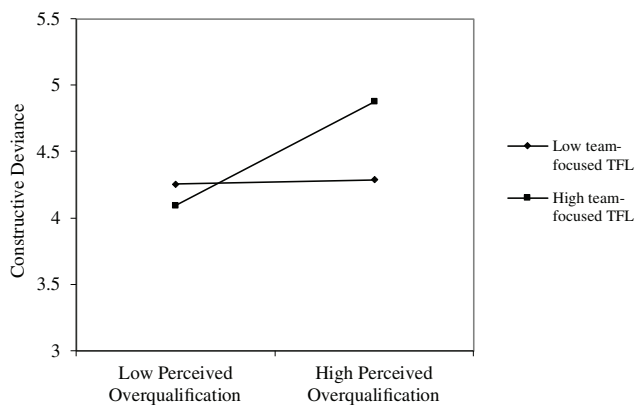


FIGURE 3 Simple slope of the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance at levels of team-focused transformational leadership (TFL) (Study 1).

significant ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$, respectively) while the effects of interpersonal deviance on task performance and employee creativity were not significant ($\beta = -0.02, n.s.$; $\beta = -0.01, n.s.$, respectively). Accordingly, the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through organizational deviance were significant (indirect effect = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.006, 0.069]; indirect effect = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.012, 0.090], respectively). On the other hand, the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through interpersonal deviance were not significant (indirect effect = -0.006 , 95% CI = $[-0.041, 0.032]$; indirect effect = -0.004 , 95% CI = $[-0.043, 0.034]$, respectively). These results suggest that overqualified employees are more likely to engage in interpersonal deviance than organizational deviance to improve their mismatched job situations, but interpersonal deviance is less effective than organizational deviance to enhance their outcomes.

Moreover, employee creativity can be differentiated into incremental and radical creativity (Madjar et al., 2011). Incremental creativity refers to ideas that involve minor changes to existing routines; radical

creativity characterizes ideas that deviate substantially from the status quo (Madjar et al., 2011). Radical creativity may not be desirable in some industries, but both incremental and radical creativity should be equally desirable in our sample industries (i.e., knowledge-intensive). Thus, to advance understanding of the areas in which overqualified employees can contribute markedly, we conducted supplementary analyses with incremental and radical creativity. We asked supervisors to assess their employees' incremental and radical creativity using Madjar et al.'s (2011) scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$ and 0.91 , respectively). Results showed that perceived overqualification was positively related to radical creativity (indirect effect = 0.14, 95% CI = [0.089, 0.201]) and incremental creativity (indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI = [0.052, 0.133]) via constructive deviance. A difference test revealed that perceived overqualification had a stronger positive relationship with radical than with incremental creativity via constructive deviance (difference = 0.05, 95% CI = [0.028, 0.094]; Cohen et al., 2003). In addition, the indirect effects of perceived overqualification on incremental and radical creativity via cynicism toward the job were both significant (i.e., indirect effect = -0.01 , 95% CI = $[-0.035, -0.002]$; = -0.02 , 95% CI = $[-0.048, -0.009]$, respectively).

3.1.6 | Discussion

In Study 1, we found that individual-focused TFL buffered the negative indirect effect of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through cynicism toward the job. On the other hand, team-focused TFL strengthened the positive indirect effect of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity through constructive deviance. Although these findings in a field setting provided external validity, this study's design did not allow for rigorous causality tests among the key variables. For instance, employees with high cynical perceptions toward their tasks and coworkers or those who engage in constructive deviance may favorably evaluate their qualifications. In addition, our measurement of overqualification was perceptually based, thus ignoring objective measures, such as comparison between an employee's qualification and the requirements of the job.

To address these issues, we replicated our findings in Study 1 using scenario-based experiments. Specifically, we manipulated the experimental scenarios with different levels of overqualification, altering education level, years of industry experience, and description of the prior position, following Campbell and Hahl (2022). We also manipulated individual-focused TFL (Experiment 1) and team-focused TFL (Experiment 2), per the original conceptualizations of the construct (Chun et al., 2016; Kark & Shamir, 2002).

3.2 | Study 2: Scenario-based experiments

3.2.1 | Experiment 1: Participants and procedures

Three hundred Chinese working adults were recruited to participate in a voluntary online experiment on Credamo, a professional online

data platform. Participants were instructed to imagine that they had recently changed their job and were now in a financial associate analyst position at another securities company. Their new position required more than 4–6 years of industry experience and a degree in economics or a related field. This information provided a reference point with which participants could assess their qualifications.

Participants responded to attention-check questions about the position. They were randomly assigned to one of four conditions and read information about their prior job and about their direct supervisor in their current organization. In our analyses, we excluded 28 participants who had failed the attention check, resulting in a final sample of 272 respondents. Among them, 28.70% were male, the average age was 29.10 years ($SD = 6.64$), and mean organizational tenure was 6.11 years ($SD = 5.51$). Four-fifths of participants had at least a bachelor's degree.

3.2.2 | Manipulations and results

We employed a 2 (overqualification: high vs. low) \times 2 (individual-focused TFL: high vs. low) between-subjects design. Participants read information in the high [low] condition that reflected such leader behaviors as [rarely] providing subordinates with customized mentoring, paying attention to subordinates' unique needs (i.e., individualized consideration), and [rarely] encouraging the individual to question assumptions or to think about problems in new ways (i.e., intellectual stimulation, Bass & Avolio, 1997; Chun et al., 2016). The full text of the scenarios is shown in the Appendix.

Following each scenario, participants assessed cynicism toward the job (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) and constructive deviance (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$) with the same measures used in Study 1. Demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, education level, and organizational tenure) were controlled in the analyses. All hypotheses were tested without the control variables to check the robustness of the findings.

To check the *overqualification* manipulation, we asked participants to report their agreement with four items from Maynard et al. (2006)

(e.g., “My education level is above the education level required by my job”; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$). Participants in the high condition ($N = 138$, $M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.56$) were more likely to agree that they were overqualified than did those in the low condition ($N = 134$, $M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.75$, $t(270) = -17.32$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 2.12$). For the *individual-focused TFL* manipulation, we asked participants to report their agreement with four items adapted from Bass and Avolio (1997) (e.g., “Zhao considers me as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from others”; $\alpha = 0.96$). Participants in the high condition reported more individual-focused TFL in their leaders ($N = 133$, $M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.42$) than did those in the low condition ($N = 139$, $M = 1.78$, $SD = 0.69$, $t(270) = -36.15$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 4.34$).

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4. MANCOVA results (Table 5) showed that the effect of overqualification on employees' responses was significant [$F(2, 263) = 25.34$, $p < 0.001$, Pillai's trace = 0.16]. As expected, participants in the high (vs. low) condition expressed more cynicism toward the job [$F(1, 264) = 44.29$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$] and constructive deviance [$F(1, 264) = 8.22$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$].

Results in Table 5 showed that the interaction term of overqualification and individual-focused TFL was significant [$Multiv. F(2, 263) = 3.90$, $p < 0.05$, Pillai's trace = 0.03]. Univariate F 's revealed that this interaction effect was negatively and significantly related to cynicism toward the job [$F(1, 264) = 4.49$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$]. Follow-up analysis of the interaction (Figure 4) demonstrated that, for participants in the high individual-focused TFL condition, there was a significant difference in cynicism toward the job between high overqualification ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.10$) and low overqualification ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 0.10$, $F(1, 264) = 117.55$, $p < 0.001$). The difference in cynicism toward the job under high overqualification ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.10$) and low overqualification ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.10$, $F(1, 264) = 60.66$, $p < 0.001$) was even larger among participants in the low individual-focused TFL condition. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. However, univariate F 's manifested that the interaction term of overqualification and individual-focused TFL on constructive deviance was not significant [$F(1, 264) = 3.69$, $n.s.$].

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables (Study 2: Experiment 1).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Gender	0.71	0.45	–							
2 Age	29.10	6.64	–0.11	–						
3 Education level	4.15	0.47	–0.12*	0.11	–					
4 Tenure	6.11	5.51	–0.12*	0.94**	0.01	–				
5 Perceived overqualification	1.51	0.50	–0.01	–0.09	–0.04	–0.07	–			
6 Individual-focused TFL	1.49	0.50	0.12	–0.02	–0.02	–0.05	0.02	–		
7 Cynicism toward the job	2.96	1.10	–0.03	–0.09	–0.06	–0.05	0.30**	–0.59**	–	
8 Constructive deviance	3.04	0.63	0.00	–0.05	–0.06	–0.05	0.18**	–0.03	0.12*	–

Note: $N = 272$. TFL = transformational leadership; gender: 0 = male; 1 = female.

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 5 Results of ANOVAs and MANOVAs for overqualification and individual-focused TFL (Study 2: Experiment 1).

	Cynicism toward the job		Constructive deviance		MANOVA results	
	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	Pillai's trace
Intercept	42.50***	0.14	52.72***	0.17	45.37***	0.26
<i>Control variables</i>						
Gender	0.69	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.34	0.00
Age	0.45	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.36	0.00
Education	1.52	0.01	1.21	0.00	1.30	0.01
Tenure	0.09	0.00	0.41	0.00	0.26	0.00
<i>Predictors</i>						
Overqualification	44.29***	0.14	8.22**	0.03	25.34***	0.16
Individual-focused TFL	172.61***	0.40	0.34	0.00	85.98***	0.40
Individual-focused TFL \times overqualification	4.49*	0.02	3.69	0.01	3.90*	0.03

Note: $N = 272$. All effects have $df = (1, 264)$ for ANOVA and $df = (2, 263)$ for MANOVA. $\eta^2 = SS_{\text{effect}} / (SS_{\text{effect}} + SS_{\text{error}})$.
 * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

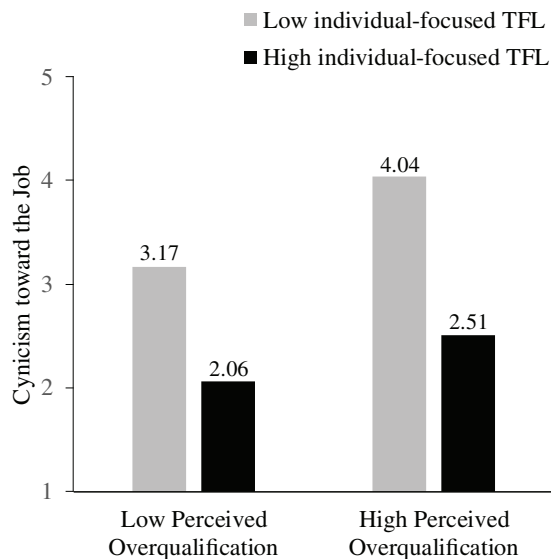


FIGURE 4 Moderating effects of individual-focused transformational leadership (TFL) on the relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism toward the job (Study 2: Experiment 1).

3.2.3 | Experiment 2: Participants and procedures

In Experiment 2, we manipulated overqualification (high vs. low) and team-focused TFL (high vs. low), resulting in a 2×2 between-subjects design. We recruited 291 employees in China using Credamo and removed 41 participants due to their failure in the attention check. Among the remaining 250 respondents, 32.80% were male, the average age was 29.03 years ($SD = 6.18$), and mean organizational tenure was 6.11 years ($SD = 7.47$). Almost three-quarters had at least a bachelor's degree.

The experimental procedures were similar to Experiment 1. We used the same manipulation of overqualification as in Experiment 1. For the team-focused TFL manipulation, we instructed participants to read information in the high [low] condition that reflected such leader behavior as [rarely] encouraging team members to prioritize the achievement of a collective goal (i.e., idealized influence) and [rarely] inspiring team members to achieve ambitious goals and visions (i.e., inspirational motivation, Bass & Avolio, 1997; Chun et al., 2016). The full text of the scenarios is shown in the Appendix. Following each scenario, participants assessed cynicism toward the job (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$) and constructive deviance (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$) with the same measures used in Experiment 1.

3.2.4 | Results

To check the *overqualification* manipulation, we asked participants to report their agreement with the same four items as those used in Experiment 1 (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$). Participants in the high condition ($N = 110$, $M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.56$) were more likely to consider themselves overqualified than did those in the low overqualification condition ($N = 140$, $M = 2.69$, $SD = 0.85$, $t(248) = -15.12$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.89$). To check the *team-focused TFL* manipulation, we asked participants to assess team-focused TFL with four items adapted from Bass and Avolio (1997) (e.g., "Our group leader (Zhao) emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.96$). Participants in the high condition reported more team-focused TFL in their leaders ($N = 115$, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.46$) than did those in the low condition ($N = 135$, $M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.96$, $t(248) = -24.41$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 3.03$).

Presented in Table 6 are the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the key variables. MANCOVA results (Table 7) showed that overqualification significantly triggered participants' responses

TABLE 6 Descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables (Study 2: Experiment 2).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Gender	0.67	0.47	-							
2 Age	29.03	6.18	-0.03	-						
3 Education level	4.18	0.57	0.11	0.10	-					
4 Tenure	6.11	7.47	-0.05	0.52**	-0.03	-				
5 Perceived overqualification	1.44	0.50	0.10	-0.02	0.04	0.07	-			
6 Team-focused TFL	1.46	0.50	-0.07	0.00	-0.04	-0.08	-0.06	-		
7 Cynicism toward the job	2.90	1.10	0.11	-0.11	0.11	-0.04	0.38**	-0.39**	-	
8 Constructive deviance	3.05	0.67	0.12	-0.01	0.09	-0.02	0.24**	0.06	0.28**	-

Note: $N = 250$. TFL = transformational leadership; gender: 0 = male; 1 = female.

** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 7 Results of ANOVAs and MANOVAs for overqualification and team-focused TFL (Study 2: Experiment 2).

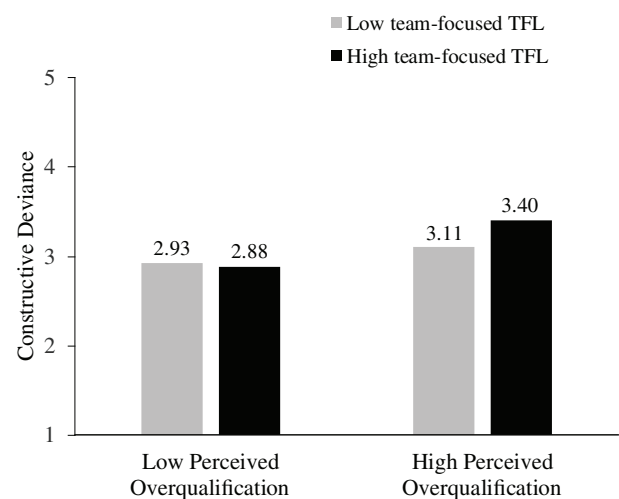
	Cynicism toward the job		Constructive deviance		MANOVA results	
	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	Pillai's trace
Intercept	28.75***	0.11	55.60***	0.19	34.35***	0.22
<i>Control variables</i>						
Gender	0.44	0.00	2.14	0.01	1.12	0.01
Age	2.10	0.01	0.02	0.00	1.16	0.01
Education	2.15	0.01	1.47	0.01	1.46	0.01
Tenure	0.27	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.16	0.00
<i>Predictors</i>						
Overqualification	43.36***	0.15	16.13***	0.06	24.67***	0.17
Team-focused TFL	41.47***	0.15	2.16	0.01	25.85***	0.18
Team-focused TFL \times overqualification	2.93	0.01	4.20*	0.02	2.87	0.02

Note: $N = 250$. All effects have $df = (1, 242)$ for ANOVA and $df = (2, 241)$ for MANOVA. $\eta^2 = SS_{\text{effect}}/SS_{\text{effect}} + SS_{\text{error}}$.

* $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$.

[$F(1, 243) = 24.67, p < 0.001$, Pillai's trace = 0.17]. That is, overqualification was positively related to cynicism toward the job [$F(1, 242) = 43.36, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.15$] and constructive deviance [$F(1, 242) = 16.13, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.06$].

The results in Table 7 revealed that the interaction effect of overqualification and team-focused TFL on constructive deviance was significant [$F(1, 242) = 4.20, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.02$]. Specifically, a simple effects-test (Figure 5) showed that, for participants in the high team-focused TFL condition, there was a significant difference in constructive deviance between high overqualification ($M = 3.40, SD = 0.59$) and low overqualification ($M = 2.88, SD = 0.53, F(1, 242) = 16.92, p < 0.001$). However, for those in the low team-focused TFL condition, there was no significant difference in constructive deviance between high overqualification ($M = 3.11, SD = 0.63$) and low overqualification ($M = 2.93, SD = 0.78, F(1, 242) = 2.18, n.s.$). These results confirmed Hypothesis 4. Univariate F 's, though, showed that the interactive effect of overqualification and team-focused TFL on cynicism toward to job was not significant [$F(2, 241) = 2.93, p > 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.01$].

**FIGURE 5** Moderating effects of team-focused transformational leadership (TFL) on the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive deviance (Study 2: Experiment 2).

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Drawing on P-E fit literature (Caplan et al., 1984; Edwards et al., 1998; Follmer et al., 2018), we theorized and found that perceived overqualification had a negative indirect effect on task performance and employee creativity via cynicism toward the job (i.e., a defense pathway). It had, though, a positive indirect effect on task performance and employee creativity via constructive deviance (i.e., a coping pathway). Furthermore, we highlighted the different moderating effects of dual-focused TFL on the relationship between perceived overqualification and the two mediating pathways (i.e., cynicism toward the job and constructive deviance).

4.1 | Theoretical implications

Our findings provide several theoretical implications regarding overqualification and leadership. First, we offer a novel explanation for why overqualified employees are more or less likely to perform well or to generate creative outcomes. Drawing P-E literature (Edwards et al., 1998; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005), we demonstrated that employees react to perceived overqualification in two different ways—a defense and a coping tactic—and that this dual path model explained both positive and negative effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity. Specifically, we demonstrate that cynicism toward the job (i.e., a defense pathway) significantly mediates the negative effect of perceived overqualification on task performance and employee creativity. Our findings replicate those of Luksyte et al. (2011) on the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and cynicism and extend such findings by highlighting the mediating effect of cynicism toward the job on the relationship between perceived overqualification and employee outcomes. Meanwhile, our results suggest that overqualified employees can regulate themselves via engaging in proactive behaviors (i.e., constructive deviance). This result corroborates the recent studies revealing that employees who feel overqualified seek to change the status quo through proactive and adaptive behaviors (Lin et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016, 2021). These results resolve the mixed findings in the literature on the main effect of perceived overqualification on task performance (Debus et al., 2023; Erdogan et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021). In addition, our dual pathways extend prior studies that focused on employees' strains as reactions to person-job misfit (i.e., deviations from normal functioning reactions, Edwards et al., 1998) such as relative deprivation (Lee et al., 2021) and anger toward employment situation (Debus et al., 2023) by investigating overqualified employees' efforts to resolve person-job misfit. Our findings also extend Debus et al. (2023) and Lee et al. (2021) by demonstrating that the dual pathways can explain both positive and negative effects of perceived overqualification on employee creativity.

These foregoing results are also important to refine overqualification theory about how employees react to perceived

overqualification, but additional research is clearly needed on this issue. For example, our study revealed that the effect of constructive deviance on employee creativity is larger than that of cynicism toward the job on employee creativity, but that there was no significant difference between the effects of constructive deviance and cynicism toward the job on task performance. For the dual pathway model that explains both positive and negative impacts of perceived overqualification on employee outcomes, future research needs to explore which pathway may have greater influence as drivers to different types of employee outcomes, such as task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee creativity. It would be also noteworthy that constructive deviance leads to radical than incremental creativity more strongly. One possible explanation for this finding is that constructive deviance that deviates from the organization's prescribed routines and norms to benefit the organization is more likely to encourage overqualified employees to think outside the box to generate solutions, and thereby enhancing more radical creativity that focuses on diverging from existing frameworks rather than the refinement of them related to incremental creativity (Madjar et al., 2011).

Another important theoretical implication of our undertaking is that TFL significantly moderates the dual pathways that link perceived overqualification to task performance and employee creativity. These results are consistent across multiple methods (i.e., a field study and two scenario-based experiments), suggesting that the internal validity of our study is high and that the causality implied in its hypotheses is supported. These findings are consistent with the view that contextual factors, especially leadership, influence how overqualified employees resolve a P-E misfit (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lambert et al., 2012; Ma, Ganegoda, et al., 2020; Tepper et al., 2018). Our results also complement Ma, Lin, and Wei's (2020) finding that perceived overqualification is positively related to work engagement and subsequent task performance, but only when empowering leadership and felt role clarity are both high.

More interestingly, individual- and team-focused TFL differentially affect the dual pathways that link perceived overqualification to task performance and employee creativity. Specifically, individual-focused TFL significantly moderated the effect of perceived overqualification on cynicism toward the job (but not on constructive deviance). These results complement Lee et al.'s (2021) findings that occupational instrumentality mitigates the negative indirect effect of perceived overqualification on self-reported task performance via relative deprivation. On the other hand, team-focused TFL enables overqualified employees to integrate collective goals and interests into their own coping adjustment (Dong et al., 2017), and enhances their constructive deviance (but does not reduce their cynicism toward the job). These results corroborate and advance Luksyte et al.'s (2011) finding that perceived organizational support and mentoring complement the effect of perceived overqualification on employee creativity, and Li et al.'s (2019) finding that supervisor-subordinate Guanxi enhances the indirect relationship between perceived overqualification and task performance via organization-based self-esteem. Future research should explore whether such differential moderating effects

of individual- and team-focused TFL apply for other dual pathways, such as relative deprivation and task mastery (Lee et al., 2021) and anger toward employment situation and work organization (Debus et al., 2023).

The distinctive moderating effects can also contribute to a developing research literature that reveals the different effects of dual-focused TFL on individual and team outcomes (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Dong et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2022). Our results extend this line of research by demonstrating that dual-focused TFL has a differential moderating impact on the relationship between perceived overqualification and employee outcomes. These findings corroborate Koo and Lee's (2021) finding that individual-focused and team-focused TFL have contrasting effects on the relationship between Machiavellians and their commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors. The distinctive moderating effects also complement and extend Kim et al.'s (2022) study showing that dual-focused TFL interacts with team scout activity and individual perspective-taking differently to affect individual creativity. Future research is needed to explore how and why dual-focused TFL interact with various contingent factors differently to affect the same team and employee outcomes.

4.2 | Practical implications

Our findings have implications for organizations and managers. We highlighted the double-edged effects of perceived overqualification on task performance and creativity. Accordingly, managers should be aware of the benefits realized from overqualified employees (Erdogan et al., 2011) via their engagement in constructive deviance. That is, overqualified employees can leverage their surplus skills and knowledge to engage in deviant behaviors that benefit the organization. Through such pro-organizational behaviors, overqualified employees may experience enhanced job meaningfulness and respect from others (Vadera et al., 2013). Thus, managers should monitor overqualified employees' constructive deviance carefully to obtain insight into how their constructive deviance can gain acceptance and lead to organizational improvements (Morrison, 2006).

In addition, our findings suggest that managers should pay attention to the role that they can play through their leadership behavior that focuses on different targets (i.e., the collective vs. individual followers, Bormann & Diebig, 2021). For instance, if employee constructive deviance is a desired behavior in the organization, organizations should consider investing in team-focused TFL training in which managers and overqualified employees will work together (i.e., emphasizing the collective goals). To amplify the positive effects of team-focused TFL on perceived overqualification and employee outcomes, improving group-based human resources practices (e.g., compensation, benefit packages, development programs) can be useful. Moreover, organizations can provide managers interventions and training programs that improve their individual-focused TFL (i.e., individualized support and constructive feedback) and help them effectively counter their overqualified employees who have cynical beliefs toward their jobs.

4.3 | Limitations and future research opportunities

Our research has certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting our results and their implications. One potential limitation is that we collected the data in our experimental studies using an online platform; as such, we had reduced control over data quality. To address this issue, we identified potentially careless responses using attention check questions (e.g., Campbell & Hahl, 2022). Also, in both online experimental studies, we only captured constructive deviance intentions instead of actual behaviors. To enhance the rigor of the causal inferences, future efforts should examine the actual behaviors in which overqualified employees may invest their efforts.

A second limitation pertains to the measurement of the dual-focused TFL construct. Although we assessed dual-focused TFL as in previous studies (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Kim et al., 2022), certain TFL dimensions may be applicable at both the individual and team levels. For example, supervisors may enthusiastically talk to their followers and the group as a collective about the needs they need to accomplish. To address this concern, consistent with extant work (Kim et al., 2022), we aligned the referents of the TFL items to align with the target of influence (i.e., we used "me" for individual-focused TFL and "our team" for team-focused TFL). Relatedly, following other scholars (e.g., Chun et al., 2016; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Kim et al., 2022), we measured dual-focused TFL using the multifactor leadership questionnaire of Bass and Avolio (1997). However, Wang and Howell (2010) have identified two additional dimensions in individual-focused TFL (i.e., communicating high expectations and providing personal recognition). These two dimensions may well contribute to overqualified employees' positive feelings at work and thus help them reconcile their feeling of being overqualified. We suggest that scholars validate our findings using Wang and Howell's (2010) scale for dual-focused TFL.

Third, our study measured perceived overqualification using self-assessment rather than leader-assessment. Conceivably, leaders may assign tasks and use certain leader behaviors in light of followers' characteristics (Riggio et al., 2008). Applied to the present context, such leader perceptions of how employees' qualifications exceed job demands might impact the overall experiences of overqualified employees at work and thus merit empirical attention. Moreover, future research could measure perceived overqualification from both employees' and leaders' perspectives and then explore the effects of congruence or incongruence between these two ratings on employee outcomes.

Fourth, our study assumed that individuals would have a stable single style of leadership instead of a repertoire of leadership styles or a leadership style that needs to be contextualized. Indeed, individual- and team-focused TFL can co-exist, perhaps together with other leadership behaviors too (Foti et al., 2012). Thus, future research should consider a person-centered approach to explore how various leadership styles operate jointly (Zaccaro et al., 2018). Also, given that contextual factors enhance or mitigate the impact of certain leadership behaviors such as TFL (Liden & Antonakis, 2009; Oc, 2018), scholars should investigate how specific situational variables—such as the task,

social, physical, or temporal context (Johns, 2006)—influence TFL directly or moderate relationships between TFL and overqualified employees' subsequent adjustments.

Fifth, our study assumed that constructive deviance is positive to focal employees' outcomes, such as task performance and creativity. However, constructive deviance, especially interpersonal deviance, may result in unintended negative consequences as our supplementary results show, and the complexity of the outcome may depend on the organizational context (Dahling et al., 2012; Vadera et al., 2013). For instance, employees may break rules with good intentions, but their actions would violate organizational norms that may lead to other organizational problems, depending on the organizational context (Dahling et al., 2012). Also, employees may disobey their supervisor's instructions to perform more efficiently, which likely negatively affects the relationship with their supervisors, and thereby being detrimental to their task performance and creativity (at least for supervisor-assessed outcomes). We suggest scholars investigate whether constructive deviance has detrimental consequences for focal employees and organizations, and under what conditions it yields favorable or unfavorable outcomes for focal employees and for others.

Finally, we collected our three studies' data in one cultural context (i.e., China), which may limit the generalizability of our results. For instance, people from cultures with highly collectivistic characteristics (e.g., China) are less likely to perceive themselves as overqualified (Hu et al., 2015). Therefore, our findings may provide a relatively conservative estimate of the relationship between perceived overqualification and employee outcomes in a unique cultural context. Future work should, therefore, validate and replicate our findings in highly individualistic cultural contexts (e.g., the United States).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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