The Curvilinear Effect of Perceived Overqualification on Constructive Voice: The Moderating Role of Leader Consultation and the Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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Abstract

Drawing from the social cognitive theory of self-regulation, we proposed a model considering an inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice. We reasoned from the theory that this curvilinear effect would be moderated by leader consultation, which could intensify the upward curvilinear trend and neutralize the downward curvilinear trend, and be mediated by work engagement. We conducted two studies to test our model. In Study 1, based on a three-wave time-lagged sample of 293 employees and 120 supervisors, we found an inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice, which was moderated by leader consultation. In Study 2, we examined the proposed moderated mediation model using a sample of 231 matched leader–subordinate dyads. We found that, at lower levels, perceived overqualification has a positive association with constructive voice, which is mediated by work engagement, especially at higher leader consultation. At higher levels, perceived overqualification has a negative association with work engagement and thus constructive voice, especially at lower levels of leader consultation. The implications of our research are discussed.

Keywords: perceived overqualification, work engagement, leader consultation, constructive voice, social cognitive theory of self-regulation

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INTRODUCTION

Perceived overqualification is defined as employees' perception that they work in jobs that require less education, knowledge, skills, and experience than they possess (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). The conventional and predominant view introduces overqualification as a form of relative deprivation (Feldman et al., 2002; Liu & Wang, 2012) or person–job misfit (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard et al., 2006). According to this view, perceived overqualification has an unfavorable effect on employees' proactive behaviors (Erdogan et al., 2011). However, an expanding body of research emphasizes the positives of overqualification (Harari et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2017) and proposes that overqualification reflects a situation where employees have surplus capabilities to contribute to an organization beyond their in-role requirements. Some empirical studies support this view and have found overqualification to be positively linked to proactive behaviors (Deng et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). More recently, scholars have begun to elucidate both the beneficial and the detrimental influences of perceived overqualification by investigating its nonlinear influences. For instance, Lin et al. (2017) proposed an inverted U-shaped relationship between overqualification (using the term "underemployment") and employees' task crafting, which is a form of proactive behavior.

Although Lin et al.'s (2017) work helps reconcile the conflicting findings of overqualification by revealing its curvilinear effect, our understanding of the relationship between overqualification and proactive behavior remains incomplete owing to two issues. First, Lin et al. (2017) considered overqualification to be a person–job misfit situation that threatens employees' self-concept; they suggested that employees craft their tasks to maintain a good self-concept when they perceive overqualification at low levels but are demotivated when

overqualification is excessively high. Although they took a step forward by considering overqualified employees to be active agents in making change, Lin et al.'s perspective only applies to task crafting or proactive behavior promoting person–job fit—that is, behavior that aims to improve employees themselves—not to proactive behaviors that aim to change and improve the organization (Parker & Collins, 2010). That is, overqualified employees who consider their situation not fit their capabilities tend to direct effort toward task crafting that increase their level of person–job fit, but not necessarily toward behaviors that improve the organizational environment, especially when these behaviors are personally risky. However, overqualified employees could be reliable and capable resources for improving the status quo of an organization as they possess capabilities over and above what the job requires. As such, there is a need to extend our understanding of whether and how overqualified employees can be agentic in engaging in proactive behaviors that aim to improve the organization.

Second, Lin et al. (2017) investigated the moderating effect of organizational identification, which is theoretically related to employees' self-concept, and did not explore potential managerial factors enhancing the positive or mitigating the negative effects of overqualification. Moreover, prior studies on the boundary conditions have mainly examined personal traits (Liu et al., 2015; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013; Zhang et al., 2016), peer attributes (Hu et al., 2015), and relatively broad leader-related variables (Alfes et al., 2016; Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016; Ma et al., 2020) to mitigate the negative consequences of overqualification. From the viewpoint of person and environment transaction, more research is needed to explore specific managerial tactics that can help organizations constructively manage overqualified employees.

In this study, we aim to address the aforementioned issues by examining the effect of perceived overqualification on constructive voice, which is a typical representative of proactive

behaviors that can improve the organization, as well as the boundary condition that moderates this effect and its mediating mechanism. According to the social cognitive theory of self-regulation, we propose that perceived overqualification has a curvilinear, inverted U-shaped effect on constructive voice. When employees perceive a low level of overqualification, their constructive voice behavior will increase because they consider constructive voice to be a challenging goal, which involves extra efforts to effect organizationally functional change (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). However, when employees perceive an extremely high level of overqualification, their constructive voice will decrease because they might find the goal of constructive voice far less challenging owing to their excess surplus capabilities.

Further, we argue that the effects of perceived overqualification will depend on the level of leader consultation. Leader consultation refers to leaders' willingness to solicit and listen to employee suggestions or concerns related to work-related issues (Yukl & Tracey, 1992; Yukl et al., 1990). It provides employees with control by offering them opportunities to take part in decision-making (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Locke et al., 1986; Vroom, 2000). For overqualified employees, when leaders consult with them and invite them to express opinions at work, this provides them with the environmental controllability to achieve goals of constructive voice. Thus, a high degree of leader consultation may enhance the positive and mitigate the negative influences of perceived overqualification.

The effort involved in striving toward a goal determines whether people with high capabilities can be effective in achieving those goals (Bandura, 1991). We propose that work engagement reflects the goal striving process of overqualified employees pursuing constructive voice. Work engagement is defined as "the harnessing of an employee's full self in terms of physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to work role performance" (Rich et al., 2010. p. 617). Kahn (1990) suggested that employees who are highly engaged in work roles focus their efforts

on the pursuit of role-related goals. Because engaged employees experience high connectivity with their work, they tend to consider all aspects of their work to be within their role domain (Christian et al., 2011), which includes constructive voice that extends beyond their task requirements. Thus, to test whether perceived overqualification is related to constructive voice by promoting or inhibiting employees' goal striving, we examine the mediating role of work engagement in the moderated inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice.

Our research makes several contributions to the overqualification literature. First, it advances the understanding of the relationship between perceived overqualification and proactive behaviors by focusing on constructive voice, which is a representative of proactive behaviors that aim to improve the organization as the outcome. Second, our self-regulation perspective also adds to the understanding of the role of leadership in overqualification research and answers calls for research on how managers use employee overqualification to their advantage (Zhang et al., 2016) by identifying leader consultation as a moderator. Third, we explicate the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice through the goal striving process represented by work engagement.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Perceived overqualification and the person–job misfit perspective

Overqualification can be measured objectively or subjectively. Objective overqualification assesses the discrepancies between employees' abilities and the demands of their job descriptions (Feldman, 1996; Maltarich et al., 2011) and is measured by data. In contrast, subjective overqualification, which is rated by employees themselves, refers to employees' perception that they possess qualifications higher than those required to perform their job (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Feldman et al., 2002; Maynard et al., 2006). Compared with objective overqualification,

prior research has indicated that perceived overqualification is a stronger and more proximal factor in influencing employees' behavior (Lin et al., 2017; Liu & Wang, 2012). As we seek to understand how overqualification can shape employees' behavior, in this study we focus on subjective overqualification.

Prior studies have mainly investigated perceived overqualification from the person–job misfit perspective, by which a perception of surplus capability in excess of the job's demands results in a state of person–job misfit (Kristof, 1996; Luksyte et al., 2011; Maynard et al., 2006). This perspective suggests that interference occurs when employees perceive that they have excess ability relative to their responsibilities (Edwards & Shipp, 2007). Supporting this view, overqualification has been found to inspire negative work attitudes such as lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Maynard et al., 2006), poor well-being (Johnson & Johnson, 1997; Siegrist et al., 1986), and poor job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Chen, 2009). Overqualified employees may feel less worthy and experience more negative affect in an organization, leading to negative linear effects on in-role and extra-role behaviors (Hu et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2015). Nevertheless, other findings challenge the person–job misfit perspective. For example, Zhang et al. (2016) found that perceived overqualification is positively related to proactive behavior through the indirect effect of role-breadth self-efficacy. Holtom et al. (2002) found no relationship between perceived overqualification and extra-role performance. Lin et al. (2017) further reported a curvilinear association between perceived overqualification and task crafting. These findings suggest that perceived overqualification is not necessarily negatively or linearly related to employee outcomes, especially behavioral outcomes, as suggested by the person–job misfit perspective.

As mentioned above, Lin et al. (2017) suggested that perceived overqualification may have a curvilinear association with employees' proactive behaviors that aim to improve person–job fit (i.e., task crafting). In this study, we offer a self-regulation perspective to examine whether, how, and when perceived overqualification has a curvilinear effect on employees' proactive behavior, which is represented by constructive voice, which aims to improve the organization. As such, we seek to offer a different lens through which to understand the curvilinear effect of perceived overqualification on employees' proactive behavior. Below, we introduce the self-regulation perspective and develop our hypotheses.

Perceived overqualification and constructive voice

The social cognitive theory of self-regulation is used to understand how personal standards are formed from numerous social influences and how individuals regulate their behaviors to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Bandura & Jourden, 1991). According to this theory, individuals regulate themselves by establishing and striving toward challenging goals that are more ambitious than goals that they have previously achieved (Bandura & Locke, 2003). Those who are competent at performing tasks are more likely to engage in such self-regulation processes because their capacity enables them to actively control rather than simply react to the effects of their effort (Bandura, 1991). Consistent with this view, employees who perceive themselves to be overqualified tend to create higher goals than those set by their job requirements and be motivated to exert efforts to strive for these goals.

Nevertheless, this goal striving process is not endless because the valence of goals can change, and individuals may find that "continued goal increases have low valence, that is, more is not better" (Phillips et al., 1996, p. 500). Self-regulation has dysfunctional consequences when it brings about negative self-evaluations (Bandura, 1991; Kanfer & Hagerman, 1981). As indicated by Phillips et al. (1996, p. 508), setting and striving for goals that exceed past levels of

performance "eventually stops at the point where the individual feels that more is not better or enough is enough … people who have performed well in the past are much more likely than people who have performed poorly in the past to reach a level where they might conclude that more is not better." When employees perceive excessive overqualification, they may feel the goal is much less challenging. We thus propose that perceived overqualification can be demotivating when it is excessively high.

Following this perspective, we propose that overqualified employees create higher goals involving the exertion of constructive voice. As speaking up is risky and not all employees are willing to do it, overqualified employees with higher capabilities are more confident in making suggestions. In addition, as voice involves providing information relevant to improving organizational functioning to direct leaders (Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010), it is a more immediate way for employees to make achievements than their regular in-role performance. Thus, overqualified employees are likely to set voice as a challenging goal. There are other forms of voice behavior, such as supportive voice (i.e., voice to support certain policies, programs, objectives, and procedures), defensive voice (i.e., voice to oppose change), and destructive voice (i.e., voice that is hurtful or critical or debases opinions) (see Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014, for a conceptual summary of different forms of voice). Constructive voice is consistent with these forms insofar as it involves expressing ideas or opinions that are focused on influencing the context of the work environment toward individuals within the organization (Morrison, 2011; Van Dyne et al., 2003; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). However, constructive voice is the process of investing extra effort to effect functional change within an organization, while other forms of voice do not require extra effort. Thus, constructive voice is more suitable than other types of voice to be a naturally challenging goal.

We propose that perceived overqualification at a low level will positively influence constructive voice given that empirical studies demonstrate a positive relationship between efficacy beliefs and voice behavior (Janssen & Gao, 2015; McAllister et al., 2007). However, when perceived overqualification is at a very high level, such that employees have capacities that far exceed their job requirements, employees will become less motivated by exerting constructive voice. Research has also found that employees who perceive extremely high levels of overqualification are more likely to leave their jobs (Erdogan & Bauer, 2020; Harari et al., 2017) than set challenging goals. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a curvilinear (i.e., inverted U-shaped) relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice.

Moderating effect of leader consultation

In addition to examining this proposed curvilinear association, we seek to examine a boundary condition of the curvilinear association between perceived overqualification and constructive voice based on the self-regulation perspective. According to Bandura (1986; 1991), environmental controllability is key in motivating individuals to achieve what they value. Individuals are motivated to engage in a self-regulation process by exercising their personal capabilities when they perceive opportunities to influence their environment (Bandura, 1991). Following this assumption, we expect to find that the curvilinear association between perceived overqualification and constructive voice can be bounded by levels of environmental controllability or the extent to which employees can influence their work environment. Leadership has been identified as a key factor in determining employees' sense of control and discretion at work (Bass, 1990; Huang, 2012; Nystrom, 1990). In this research, we focus on leader consultation as the moderator.

We now elaborate on how leader consultation can moderate the curvilinear association between perceived overqualification and constructive voice across different levels of perceived overqualification. We first elaborate on the role of leader consultation in driving self-regulation at work and then indicate how it can moderate the curvilinear association in a specific way.

Leader consultation provides employees with opportunities to expand their influence at work (Duan et al., 2020; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012) because "the belief that one might influence decision-makers (hence the hope that the decision-makers may do the right thing) tends to be stronger when people are given rather than denied chance to express their views" (Shapiro & Brett, 2005, p. 161). Such feelings of influence cause employees to believe that they have discretion over their behaviors and important work outcomes (Brockner et al., 2004; Spreitzer, 1995), which increases their perception that they can influence work environment. Thus, leader consultation provides employees with opportunities to drive their self-regulation. Leader consultation also opens lines of communication, as it is received as leaders' receptiveness to alternative views (Yukl & Fu, 1999) and concern for certain employees (Carnevale et al., 2018). Thus, leader consultation creates the impression that employees belong to a responsive environment and enhances their sense of belonging and inclusion at work (Ferris et al., 2008; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

Based on the above functions, we propose that leader consultation would moderate the curvilinear relationship between overqualification and constructive voice. Specifically, when leaders engage in more consultation with employees, the positive relationship between low levels of perceived overqualification and constructive voice will be stronger and the negative relationship between high levels of perceived overqualification and constructive voice will be weaker.

As we argued earlier, when employees perceive low levels of overqualification, they are more likely to utilize their surplus capabilities to pursue challenging goals and therefore make more constructive voice. When leader consultation is high, employees with low levels of overqualification are invited by their leader to participate in organizational decision-making and make suggestions (Kim & Yukl, 1998; Vroom, 2000). As a result, they have a strong sense of autonomy (Gardell, 1977; Spector, 1986) and are motivated to utilize skills in ways that contribute to their job and the organization (Debus et al., 2019; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Wu et al., 2017), such as making constructive voice. Therefore, the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice is likely to be strong in such situations. In contrast, when leader consultation is low, employees with low levels of overqualification are less able to use their surplus capabilities in ways constructive to their job and the organization because their leader offers fewer opportunities for them to do so. In such situations, the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice is likely to be weak. Taken together, at low levels, the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice is stronger for employees with higher leader consultation.

At high levels, perceived overqualification is likely to have a negative relationship with constructive voice because employees will tend to perceive making constructive voice as far less challenging. This negative relationship can be alleviated with high leader consultation. When leader consultation is high, employees who perceive relatively high levels of overqualification are stimulated by their leaders and given opportunities to exert influences at work. This may counterbalance the effects of boredom and relative deprivation induced by high levels of overqualification. In support, research has found that high perceived impact at work (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009), opportunities to enhance their sense of meaning at work (Wu et al., 2015), and open communication with leaders (Kengatharan, 2020) can mitigate the negative effect of

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overqualification on feelings of deprivation and/or job satisfaction. Therefore, the negative

relationship between high levels of overqualification and constructive voice is likely to be weak

when leader consultation is high. In contrast, when leader consultation is low, employees with

high levels of overqualification are more likely to feel demotivated because they tend not to have

opportunities to utilize their surplus capabilities to make a difference at work. Thus, the negative

relationship between high levels of overqualification and constructive voice is likely to be strong.

Taken together, at high levels, the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and

constructive voice is weaker for employees with higher leader consultation.

Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 2: At different levels of perceived overqualification, leader consultation

moderates the effect of perceived overqualification and constructive voice. Specifically, (a) at

relatively low levels of perceived overqualification, perceived overqualification will have a

stronger positive effect on constructive voice when leader consultation is higher than when it is

lower, and (b) at relatively high levels of perceived overqualification, perceived

overqualification will have a weaker negative effect on constructive voice when leader

consultation is higher than when it is lower.

Mediating effect of work engagement

We argue that employees' overqualification perceptions influence their work engagement

differently at different levels of perceived overqualification. Specifically, we propose that, at

lower levels, perceived overqualification is positively associated with work engagement for two

main reasons. First, for employees who are overqualified at relatively low levels, the discrepancy

between capability and performance requirements increases employees' sense of mastery (Liu &

Wang, 2012) and motivates them to dedicate their full energies to their work (Benedek et al.,

2014; Harari et al., 2017). Studies on self-efficacy have found that a sense of mastery contributes

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to employees' motivation at work (Bandura & Locke, 2003) and mobilizes their efforts and resources for goal attainment (Bandura, 1991). Second, at relatively low levels, overqualification may give employees a sense of influence and superiority among their peers (Deng et al., 2018; Erdogan et al., 2011). Such a feeling of influence can motivate them to strive for internal goals (Bandura & Cervone, 1983; Bandura & Jourden, 1991). To achieve their goals, these employees are likely to dedicate their capabilities and energies to their work. Thus, at lower levels of perceived overqualification, we predict a positive relationship with work engagement.

In contrast, at higher levels of perceived overqualification, we argue that perceived overqualification is negatively related to work engagement. When employees perceive an overqualification level that is excessively high, they may perceive their jobs as being too easy (understimulating), which results in boredom and their minds wandering (Westgate & Wilson, 2018). In such scenarios, employees do not make full use of their capabilities (Harju & Hakanen, 2016) and disengage from their work roles, which lack satisfying activities (Eastwood et al., 2012). Moreover, those with relatively high levels of overqualification also tend to experience strong negative feelings such as relative deprivation (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Lee et al., 2021) and negative attitudes toward their organization (Wu & Chi, 2020), which decrease their motivation (Feldman et al., 2002) and career satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2018). This finding may be explained by the inability of their work environment to support them in offsetting the significant discrepancy between their internal standards and job requirements. Such negative affective consequences undermine their motivation to engage in goal striving activities in self-regulatory processes (Bandura, 1986; 1991). Such individuals are also likely to attribute their undesirable situation to unfair treatment by the organization (Liu & Wang, 2012), which discourages them from participating in activities at work. As such, at relatively high levels of perceived overqualification, we predict a negative relationship with work engagement. In sum,

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we expect that there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived overqualification and work engagement.

Further, we propose that leader consultation moderates the curvilinear relationship between perceived overqualification and work engagement. Specifically, at low levels, the positive relationship between perceived overqualification and work engagement can be enhanced with high leader consultation. This is the case because when leader consultation is high, employees with low levels of perceived overqualification are likely to utilize the supportive environment to engage efforts to achieve challenging goals. Research has shown that favorable organizational support, including leader support, can lead to high performance-related outcomes of overqualified employees (Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016). However, at high levels, the negative relationship between perceived overqualification and work engagement can be weakened by leader consultation. This is because when leader consultation is high, employees with high levels of perceived overqualification may find that they still have opportunities to influence their work, which helps alleviate the demotivating effect of overqualification on the work engagement.

Work engagement in turn can contribute to constructive voice. According to Parker et al. (2010), higher work engagement can motivate employees to initiate change because a high degree of activation, such as having ample energy, encourages them to establish of goals and strive toward proactive behaviors such as constructive voice. Empirically, engagement has been found to positively relate to voice behavior because engaged employees harness themselves to their work roles in ways that allow them to express their real feelings and develop strategies for improvement (Christian et al., 2011; Lam et al., 2016). Considering the moderating hypothesis and the mediating role of work engagement together, we further propose that perceived

overqualification interacts with leader consultation to influence employees' work engagement (in an inverted U-shape), which, in turn, positively relates to constructive voice.

Hypothesis 3: Work engagement mediates the moderating effect of leader consultation on the curvilinear relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice.

We performed two studies to test our research model (see Figure 1). In Study 1, we tested the inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice (Hypothesis 1) and the moderating effect of leader consultation on this inverted U-shaped relationship (Hypothesis 2). In Study 2, we replicated the findings in Study 1 and further tested the entire mediated moderation model (Hypothesis 3) by additionally including work engagement as a mediator. Our two-study approach offers a stronger examination of the curvilinear effect of perceived overqualification on employees' constructive voice behavior.

Insert Figure 1 about here

STUDY 1: METHODS

Procedure and sample

Data were collected from surveys completed by matched pairs of subordinates and their direct supervisors from 21 companies in the manufacturing, construction, and retail industries in China. We randomly invited 381 front-line employees and their direct leaders to participate in our survey with the help of human resource managers. Questionnaires were administered to both subordinates and their direct leaders. To reduce common method bias, three waves of data collection were performed over an eight-week period (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In the first-wave survey (Time 1), each employee was invited to report on their perceived overqualification, their general levels of self-efficacy and psychological safety, and their demographic information. Four weeks later, in the second-wave survey (Time 2), employees who provided usable data in the

first wave were again invited to report their ratings of leader consultation. The third wave of the

survey (Time 3) was administered four weeks thereafter. We invited the direct leaders of the

participating employees to provide ratings of each subordinate's constructive voice behaviors.

We ultimately obtained 293 matched samples for data analysis after removing questionnaires

with missing data (120 leaders and 293 subordinates returned usable questionnaires, and each

leader rated 2.4 employees on average; the response rate was 76.90%). All respondents were

asked to place completed surveys in sealed envelopes and return them directly to the research

assistants to ensure confidentiality.

Of the 293 subordinates, 68.90% were male. The subordinates' average age was 35.44

years (SD = 7.15) and they had, on average, nine years of work experience with their current

organization (SD = 7.71). A total of 59.40% of the subordinates had a bachelor's degree or

above. Of the matched leaders, 82.90% were male. The leaders' average age was 42.50 years

(SD = 6.08) and they had an average organizational tenure of 12.09 years (SD = 6.96). A total of

54.90% of the leaders had a college degree or above.

Measures

Because all measures used in this study were validated and originally composed in English, they

were initially translated into Chinese and then back-translated into English by a panel of

bilingual experts following the procedures of Brislin (1983).

Perceived overqualification. We measured employee perceptions of overqualification

using the four-item scale developed by Johnson and Johnson (1996). A sample item is "Based on

my skills, I am overqualified for the job I hold." Consistent with Lin et al. (2017), in which the

nonlinear effect of perceived overqualification (or underemployment) was examined, these items

were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly

agree"). Cronbach's alpha was 0.73.

Constructive voice. In our study, we focused on constructive voice behavior or employees' voluntary expression of ideas, information, or opinions aimed at effecting constructive change at work (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). We used the nine-item speaking-up subscale developed by Liu et al. (2010) to measure constructive voice. A sample item is "This person develops and makes recommendations to me concerning issues that affect our organization." The response format used the frequency style, which ranges from 1 ("never") to 5 ("very often"). The reliability of this scale was 0.91.

Leader consultation. We measured leader consultation with the four-item scale developed by Kim and Yukl (1998). A sample item is "Your leader consults with you to get your ideas about a proposed activity or change that he or she wants you to support or implement." This measure was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.84.

Control variables. We controlled for gender, work tenure with the current organization, and education level of the employees and leaders participating in our study. In addition, we controlled for employees' general self-efficacy and psychological safety. General self-efficacy was controlled to partial out individuals' general sense of their capacity to master situations and goal achievement to capture the proposed positive self-discrepancy effects resulting from perceived overqualification. General self-efficacy was measured by using the 10-item scale developed by Zhang and Schwarzer (1995). A sample item is "I believe I can get all things done if I try to do." The items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("totally wrong") to 4 ("totally correct"). Cronbach's alpha value for this scale was 0.91.

We controlled for psychological safety, an overall positive situational climate for voice, to ensure that it is leaders' consultation but not the overall climate that brings about the proposed moderating effects. It was measured using the five-item scale developed by Liang et al. (2012).

A sample item is "In my work unit, I can express my true feelings regarding my job." This scale was measured using a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.84.

Analytic strategy

In this study, all constructs were conceptualized and measured at the individual level. However, our data might lack independence because the supervisors' responses were nested (i.e., a single supervisor provided voice behavior assessments for nearly three subordinates on average). A one-way random analysis of the variance in the outcome variables showed that the variances in supervisor-level means of speaking up ($F(119,292) = 1.52$, $p < 0.01$) were significant. The ICC(1) for speaking up was 0.15, which is greater than the median value of 0.12 across the studies reviewed by James et al. (1982). Thus, there might be substantial variances in the outcome variables. We therefore used a design-based modeling approach that "takes the multilevel data or dependency into account by adjusting for parameter estimate standard errors based on the sampling design" (Wu & Kwok, 2012, p. 17) and employed the complex model in Mplus 7.4 to test all of the hypotheses while considering the random variance effect of supervisor level and the correlated structure of the data (Foo et al., 2009).

<center>STUDY 1: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</center>

Confirmatory factor analysis

We performed confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) of five factors: perceived overqualification, constructive voice, leader consultation, and two control variables—general self-efficacy and psychological safety. We parceled constructive voice and general self-efficacy into five items according to their factor loadings since the measurement scales for these two variables were long. The results show that the five-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2/df = 2.55$, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.07).[1]

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Additionally, we compared the five-factor model to alternative models using a χ^2 difference test to examine the discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1, the five-factor model fit the data significantly better than alternative models. Thus, a five-factor model was applied in further analyses. Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables.

Insert Tables 1 & 2 about here

Results

To test the potential curvilinear influence of perceived overqualification, we initially checked its effect on constructive voice by regressing constructive voice on perceived overqualification and the squared term while controlling for psychological safety, general self-efficacy, and demographic information. The results showed that the curvilinear relationship was statistically significant ($B = -0.25$, *S.E.* $= 0.07$, $p < 0.001$; see M1–3 in Table 3). The slope of the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice was positive at lower levels (1 SD below the mean) of perceived overqualification (*effect* $= 0.37$, *S.E.* $= 0.10$, 95% CI $= [0.18, 0.60]$) and negative at higher levels (1 SD above the mean) of perceived overqualification (*effect* $= -0.40$, *S.E.* $= 0.14$, 95% CI $= [-0.65, -0.12]$). We further calculated the tangent slopes following prior studies (e.g., Lee & Antonakis, 2014; Wang et al., 2018) to clarify the curvilinear relationship. As shown in Figure 2, the tangent slope analyses indicated that the positive slope decreased and reversed when overqualification was higher, suggesting that there was an upward trend at lower levels of overqualification and a downward trend at higher levels of overqualification. The inflection point (the value at which the inverted U-shaped curve transitioned from upward to downward) was slightly to the left of the scale center (perceived overqualification = 3.34). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Insert Table 3 about here

We introduced leader consultation as a moderator into the regression equation to provide preliminary support for Hypothesis 2. Following prior examinations of the moderating effects of curvilinear relationships (e.g., Sui et al., 2016; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012; Van Der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005), we found that the linear interaction between perceived overqualification and leader consultation (PO × LC) was significant in the presence of the perceived overqualification squared term ($B = 0.14$, *S.E.* = 0.06, $p < 0.05$; see M1–4 in Table 3). The significance of the interaction term indicated that the slope of the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice, at any particular level of perceived overqualification, was a function of leader consultation. Moreover, the interaction between leader consultation and the quadratic term of perceived overqualification (PO^2 × LC) was not significant, indicating that the moderation effect of leader consultation only changed the slope, whereas the shape of the inverted U was constant irrespective of the moderator.

To further investigate the moderating effect, we estimated the curves between perceived overqualification and voice behavior for low (−1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of leader consultation and plotted the relationship. When leader consultation was higher, we found a positive effect at relatively low levels of perceived overqualification (effect = 0.41, S.E. = 0.16, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.72]) but no significant effect at relatively high levels of perceived overqualification (effect = −0.22, S.E. = 0.17, 95% CI = [−0.56, 0.12]). When leader consultation was lower, we found a negative relationship at relatively high levels of perceived overqualification (effect = −0.43, S.E. = 0.12, 95% CI = [−0.66, −0.21]) but no significant effect at relatively low levels of perceived overqualification (effect = 0.15, S.E. = 0.11, 95% CI = [−0.06, 0.35]). The interaction effects are shown in Figure 2.

Tangent slope analyses also provided additional evidence that an inverted U relationship exists between overqualification and constructive voice. As overqualification increased, the positive slope became less significant and reversed near $X = 3$ (where X refers to the value of overqualification) at a lower level of leader consultation and near $X = 4$ at a higher level of leader consultation. Following Bunderson and Sutcliffe (2003), we calculated the maximum points for each curve, revealing the exact point at which increases in perceived overqualification began to negatively influence constructive voice, which shifted to the right as levels of leader consultation increased (high level of leader consultation: inflection = 3.35; low level of leader consultation: inflection = 2.96). These findings suggest that leader consultation is a relevant factor reflecting boundary conditions of the curvilinear effect of perceived overqualification. Now, we move to Study 2, in which we included work engagement as a mediator and tested all hypotheses.

STUDY 2: METHODS

The central theoretical rationale underlying the curvilinear relationship between perceived overqualification and employees' constructive voice behavior rests on the argument that surplus capabilities can affect employees' goal striving processes. Specifically, overqualified employees are motivated to set higher goals according to their own capability standards (i.e., constructive voice behavior) and exert full energy toward achieving their goals. However, when perceived overqualification exceeds a certain level, employees will be discouraged from engaging in such behaviors as pursuing higher goals becomes relatively less attractive. Building upon Study 1, we seek to test this idea by examining whether work engagement mediates the curvilinear

relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice behavior in Study 2. In addition to the mediation test, we examine the entire moderated mediation model in Study 2.

Procedure and sample

We collected data for Study 2 from matched dyads of front-line subordinates and their direct supervisors working in 15 manufacturing enterprises in China. Three waves of data collection were performed over a 10-week period. In the first-wave survey (Time 1), we sent questionnaires to 300 employees who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study to report their demographic information, perceived overqualification, and general self-efficacy and psychological safety. Five weeks later, in the second-wave survey (Time 2), 266 employees who provided usable data at Time 1 were identified and invited to report their ratings of leader consultation and work engagement (with a response rate of 88.67%). The third wave of the survey (Time 3) was performed five weeks thereafter. We invited the direct leaders of employees who had completed the Time 2 survey to provide ratings of each subordinate's constructive voice. We ultimately obtained 231 matched samples at Time 3 (108 leaders and 231 subordinates returned questionnaires, and each leader rated 2.1 employees on average; the valid response rate was 86.84%). All participants were asked to place completed surveys in sealed envelopes and return them directly to the research assistants to ensure confidentiality.

Among the 231 subordinates, 57.14% were male and 69% had a bachelor's degree or above. The subordinates' average age was 30.21 years ($SD = 7.24$) and their average organizational tenure was 4.06 years ($SD = 4.35$). Of the matched leaders, 76.19% were male, with an average age of 36.91 years ($SD = 6.84$) and an average organizational tenure of 7.58 years ($SD = 5.66$). A total of 77.06% of the leaders had a college degree or above.

Measures

We translated all measurements following the translation and back-translation procedures advocated by Brislin (1983).

Perceived overqualification. We measured employee perceptions of overqualification using the nine-item scale developed by Maynard et al. (2006) to obtain a wide range of items to assess this concept. A sample item is "My job requires less education than I have." The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") following prior studies (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.83.

Constructive voice. To avoid fatigue in answering our questionnaire and to enhance the robustness of our results, we used a scale shorter than and different from that used in Study 1. Constructive voice in this study was measured with the three-item scale developed by Liu et al. (2017). One sample item is "gave me constructive suggestions regarding work-related issues." The response format used the frequency style, which ranges from 1 ("never") to 5 ("very often"). The reliability of this scale was 0.84.

Leader consultation. We measured leader consultation with the same scale used in Study 1. Cronbach's alpha value of this scale was 0.84.

Work engagement. Work engagement was measured using the nine-item scale developed by Rich et al. (2010). A sample item is "I exert my full effort on my job." It was also rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). Cronbach's alpha of this scale was 0.93.

Control variables. We controlled for the gender, organizational tenure, and education level of the participating employees and leaders. In addition, we controlled for employees' general self-efficacy and psychological safety with the same scales used in Study 1. Cronbach's alphas were 0.86 and 0.88 for the two scales, respectively.

All constructs were measured at the individual level except for constructive voice. A one-way random analysis of the variance in constructive voice showed that the variances at the supervisor level were significant ($F(107, 230) = 1.59$, $p < 0.01$). The ICC(1) for constructive voice was 0.58, which is greater than the median value of 0.12 across the studies reviewed by James et al. (1982). We therefore employed a complex model to test all of our hypotheses while considering the random variance effect from the supervisor level and the correlated structure of the data (Foo et al., 2009).

STUDY 2: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Confirmatory factor analysis

We performed CFAs to examine the fitness of the six-factor model (perceived overqualification, work engagement, constructive voice, leader consultation, and two control variables—general self-efficacy and psychological safety). Similar to Study 1, we parceled work engagement into three items according to its dimensions, and perceived overqualification and general self-efficacy into five items according to loadings. As shown in Table 4, the proposed six-factor model demonstrated acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.80$, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05),[2] and the six-factor model fit the data considerably better than any of the alternative models. Table 5 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of the variables used in Study 2.

Insert Tables 4 & 5 about here

Results

As shown in Table 6, perceived overqualification had an inverted U-shaped relationship with constructive voice ($B = -0.23$, *S.E.* = 0.10, $p < 0.01$; see M2–5 in Table 6). The slope of voice on overqualification was positive at a low level (1 SD below the mean) of perceived

overqualification (*effect* = 0.33, *S.E.* = 0.12, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.56]) and negative at a high level

(1 SD above the mean) of perceived overqualification (*effect* = −0.30, *S.E.* = 0.11, 95% CI =

[−0.53, −0.08]). A tangent slope analysis (in Figure 3) further yielded results consistent with the

regression analysis, and the inflection point was 2.86. Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

To test Hypothesis 2, we replicated the finding that leader consultation moderates the

relationship between overqualification and constructive voice. As shown in Table 6, the linear

interaction between perceived overqualification and leader consultation (PO × LC) was

significant (B = 0.36, *S.E.* = 0.12, p < 0.01; see M2–7 in Table 6). Similar to Study 1, the tangent

slope analysis presented in Figure 3 provided consistent evidence that the positive slope reversed

near $X = 3$ at a lower level of leader consultation and near $X = 4$ at a higher level of leader

consultation. In addition, as shown in Table 7, when leader consultation was higher, we obtained

a positive effect at relatively low levels of perceived overqualification (*effect* = 0.52, *S.E.* = 0.16,

90% CI = [0.25, 0.78]) but no significant effect at relatively high levels of perceived

overqualification (*effect* = −0.03, *S.E.* = 0.22, 90% CI = [−0.40, 0.33]). When leader consultation

was lower, we found a negative relationship at relatively high levels of perceived

overqualification (*effect* = −0.66, *S.E.* = 0.23, 90% CI = [−1.03, −0.29]) but no significant effect

at relatively low levels of perceived overqualification (*effect* = −0.09, *S.E.* = 0.22, 90% CI =

[−0.28, 0.45]). The interaction effects are shown in Figure 3. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported

in Study 2.

To further test the moderated curvilinear indirect effects in Hypothesis 3, we multiplied

the coefficients of the interaction terms of leader consultation by perceived overqualification and

perceived overqualification squared on work engagement and the coefficient of work

engagement on voice behavior. The results show that the interaction term (perceived

overqualification × leader consultation) was positively and significantly related to voice (B =

0.31, *S.E.* = 0.12, *p* < 0.05; see M2–8 in Table 6). Additionally, we found that the quadratic term

of perceived overqualification on voice behavior remained significant in full model testing, even

after work engagement was included (*B* = −0.16, *S.E.* = 0.08, *p* < 0.05; see M2–8 in Table 6). In

addition, as shown in Table 7, for lower levels of perceived overqualification, work engagement

mediated the effect of overqualification on constructive voice only when leader consultation was

high (*conditional mediation effect* = 0.09, *S.E.* = 0.06, 90% CI = [0.02, 0.19]). For relatively high

levels of perceived overqualification, work engagement mediated the effect of overqualification

on constructive voice only when leader consultation was low (*conditional mediation effect* =

−0.27, *S.E.* = 0.10, 90% CI = [−0.43, −0.10]). We also used the R Mediation software program to

calculate Monte Carlo and asymptotic normal theory confidence intervals (Tofighi &

MacKinnon, 2016) to estimate the conditional indirect effects. Similar to the results of the

complex model in Mplus, the indirect effect was significant when leader consultation was high

for lower levels of perceived overqualification (*estimate* = 0.03, *S.E.* = 0.02, 95% CI = [0.00,

0.06]) and when leader consultation was low for higher levels of perceived overqualification

(*estimate* = −0.08, *S.E.* = 0.04, 95% CI= [−0.17, −0.02]). These results indicated a curvilinear

moderated mediation effect. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Insert Tables 6, 7 & Figure 3 about here

By comparing Figure 2 and Figure 3, we find differences between the results of Study 1

and Study 2. First, the inflection points of perceived overqualification in the inverted U-shaped

curvilinear graphs of the two studies are different (Study 1 inflection = 3.34, Study 2 inflection =

2.86). A possible reason is that the mean of perceived overqualification of Study 1 is slightly

higher than that of Study 2 (M_{s1} = 3.37, SD_{s1} = 0.76; M_{s2} = 2.88, SD_{s2} = 0.68). Second, the

crossover patterns of the moderating effect of leader consultation shown in Figure 2 (right) and

Figure 3 (right) are different. While Figure 3 presents a crossover, Figure 2 does not, which may also be due to the finding that the mean of perceived overqualification of Study 1 is slightly higher than that of Study 2. As the trends of the simple slopes in these two figures are consistent, we are likely to find crossover if we stretch out Figure 2 to the left side by including participants with much lower degrees of perceived overqualification in the first sample.

SUPPLEMENTAL ANALYSES

We collected a supplemental data to prove that the two voice scales we used are consistent with the typical constructive voice scale of Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) and to differentiate our dependent variable of constructive voice from the other types of voice behavior. We delivered a one-wave questionnaire to 250 employees and 215 gave valid responses. Among the 215 participants, 57.21% (123) were male, their average age was 33.31 years (SD = 6.29), and they had on average 6.19 years (SD = 5.50) of work experience in their current organization. A total of 87.91% of the employees had a college degree or above. Different voice scales (a nine-item constructive voice in Study 1, a three-item constructive voice in Study 2, typical constructive voice, supportive voice, defensive voice, and destructive voice) were included in the data collection. Specifically, typical constructive voice, supportive voice, defensive voice, and destructive voice were measured using the scales developed by Maynes and Podsakoff (2014).

Results

Table 8 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of these variables. As shown in Table 8, the measure of constructive voice in Study 1 and the measure of constructive voice in Study 2 are more highly correlated with the constructive voice scale developed by Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) than other scales. We also conducted a CFA comparison to provide evidence of discriminant validity. Results are shown in Table 9. The CFA comparison results indicate that the six-factor model including all variables exhibited good fit to the data:

χ^2/df = 2.28, CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.07, RMSEA = 0.08. It also had a better fit to the data than alternative models. Moreover, Table 9 shows that three five-factor models (combining items from the two measures in Study 1 and 2 together under a factor; combining items from the measure in Study 1 and Maynes and Podsakoff's constructive voice scale under a factor; and combining items from the measure in Study 2 and Maynes and Podsakoff's constructive voice scale under a factor) fit the data better than other alternative models.

These findings show that the scales we used are actually measuring constructive voice in meaning, rather than other types of voice. Moreover, our dependent variable is significantly distinct from other types of voice, such as supportive voice, destructive voice, and defensive voice. Thus, our research model cannot be replaceable by considering other voice behaviors as the outcome.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Drawing on the social cognitive theory of self-regulation (Bandura, 1991), we found that, in both studies, perceived overqualification had a curvilinear association with constructive voice behavior. Employees who perceive moderate levels of overqualification engage in more constructive voice than those who perceive low or high levels of overqualification. The findings of Study 2 further reveal that work engagement explains the identified curvilinear association, while leader consultation can moderate the curvilinear mediation mechanism. Specifically, when leader consultation is high, perceived overqualification has a positive relationship with work engagement and thus constructive voice at lower levels of perceived overqualification and a null relationship at higher levels of perceived overqualification. When leader consultation is low, perceived overqualification has a null relationship with work engagement and thus constructive voice at lower levels of perceived overqualification but a negative relationship at higher levels of perceived overqualification.

Theoretical implications

First, our research advances the understanding of the relationship between perceived overqualification and proactive behaviors by focusing on constructive voice, which is representative of proactive behaviors that aim to improve the organization as the outcome. In a departure from prior studies that adopted the misfit or mastery perspectives to investigate the influences of perceived overqualification, Lin et al. (2017) considered overqualified employees to be active agents who can make change. They argued that lower levels of overqualification motivate employees to craft their job tasks to maintain their positive self-image at work. Although their arguments provide an apt account for the effects of overqualification on proactive behaviors that can directly benefit one's self-image by enhancing person–job fit (e.g., task crafting), they may not provide a straightforward prediction regarding the effects of overqualification on proactive behaviors directed to the team or organization such as constructive voice, which is inherently risky (Morrison, 2011), not always well received by supervisors (Burris, 2012), and may even result in negative outcomes for the voicer (e.g., turnover: McClean et al. 2013; low performance ratings from supervisor: Burris et al., 2013). Following the theoretical lens of active agent and drawing on the social cognitive theory of self-regulation, we investigated the effects of perceived overqualification on proactive behaviors that aim to benefit the organization. We demonstrate that lower levels of overqualification can motivate employees to strive for higher goals and thereby engage in more constructive voice behaviors even if doing so may not benefit their self-image. However, excessive overqualification discourages the use of constructive voice. Our research thus complements Lin et al. (2017) in explaining the effect of overqualification on proactive behaviors from the agentic perspective by focusing on proactive behavior that aims to change and improve the organization.

As proactive behaviors, constructive voice in our research and task crafting in Lin et al.'s (2017) research are different in their motivation. Indeed, task crafting enhances pro-organizational results such as creativity and OCBO according to Lin et al. (2017), these results are indirectly influenced by overqualification via task crafting, which is intended to improve employees themselves. The outcomes of task crafting will not influence its motivation. In order to fulfill the self-interest motivation (i.e., to solve the problem of person–job misfit), overqualified employees would engage in more task-crafting behaviors, rather than pro-organizational behaviors in the most intuitive way. Through the same lens, constructive voice is intended to benefit the organization. With such pro-organizational motivation, overqualified employees would conduct constructive voice directly rather than task crafting. Thus, our research is distinct from Lin et al. (2017) in focusing on different proactive behaviors induced by perception of overqualification.

Second, our research offers a self-regulation perspective and identifies work engagement as the preferred mechanism through which to understand the nonlinear association between perceived overqualification and constructive voice. Prior studies have shown that overqualification is related to subordinates' proactive behaviors, either positively (e.g., Zhang et al., 2016) or negatively (e.g., Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016). Studies have demonstrated the negative influence mainly from the relative deprivation and person–job misfit perspectives. These studies have focused on the mediating effects of self-esteem (Liu et al., 2015), commitment (Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013), and person–organization fit (Hu et al., 2015) to explain the negative influence of overqualification perception. Studies demonstrated the positive influence from the viewpoint of mastery. For example, Zhang et al. (2016) found that role-based self-efficacy can explain the positive effect of overqualification on proactive behavior. Although Zhang et al. (2016) contended that they used the self-regulation perspective, they did not explore

the goal striving process after employees' efficacy appraisal and thus cannot capture the potential

curvilinear relationship between overqualification and proactive behavior. Drawing from the

social cognitive theory of self-regulation, people are motivated or demotivated to strive toward

their goals based on their appraisal of capabilities. By investigating the mediating effect of work

engagement, our research elaborated upon the goal striving process, which is the key to revealing

the curvilinear influence that emerges between efficacy appraisal and behavioral outcomes.

Thus, our focus on work engagement provides us with a complete picture for understanding

overqualification from the self-regulation perspective. Moreover, Lin et al.'s (2017) research

proposes a curvilinear relationship between overqualification and task crafting but does not

explore the psychological mechanism behind that. By exploring the mediating effect of work

engagement, we thus extend prior understanding by demonstrating that the previous conflicting

findings can be reconciled by identifying a curvilinear relationship between overqualification

and proactive behavior.

In addition, our research enriches the antecedents of work engagement. Although prior

research has found that perceived demands–abilities fit enhances work engagement (Ho &

Astakhova, 2018), our research findings indicate that lower levels of overqualification, which

implies a demands–abilities misfit condition, can also increase work engagement. However,

consistent with the findings of Ho and Astakhova (2018), relatively high levels of

overqualification decrease work engagement. Our findings, therefore, advance the existing

knowledge about the antecedents of work engagement.

Finally, by obtaining support for the hypothesized moderating effect of leader

consultation, our study adds to the understanding of the role of leadership in overqualification

research. We found that, by engaging in consultation, leaders create a favorable environment for

those with lower levels of perceived overqualification to engage their voice in the organization,

and leader consultation can mitigate the negative impact of perceived overqualification for those with relatively high levels of perceived overqualification. Prior studies focusing on boundary conditions have mainly proposed employees' personal traits (e.g., Liu et al. 2015; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013) or peer attributes (e.g., Hu et al., 2015) to mitigate the negative consequences of overqualification. However, researchers have called for management behaviors as moderators to capture the positive outcomes of overqualification (Zhang et al., 2016). A few studies examining the role of leadership in overqualification research have mainly focused on leader–member exchange and humble leadership (Alfes et al., 2016; Ma et al., 2020). Unlike these studies, which have focused on a relatively broad assessment of leader–subordinate relationships or leader behaviors, our research pinpoints specific leader behavior—collectively known as leader consultation—as a boundary condition for understanding how leader tactics help manage overqualified employees' work engagement and constructive voice. Thus, our findings provide solutions for managers to effectively utilize overqualified employees' surplus capabilities to achieve organizational benefits.

Managerial implications

Our research provides important implications for managerial practices. Most HR managers, drawing from research, are against hiring overqualified employees owing to the negative outcomes of overqualification. Our results provide a more complete understanding for the managers to reconsider the effectiveness of employees' overqualification perception in organization. Here we identify several specific ways that can transfer our findings into practice. First, given the inverted U-shaped relationship found between perceived overqualification and constructive voice, it is important for HR managers to gauge the level of overqualification when selecting and managing employees and to be cautious with "too much" overqualification. When recruiting new employees, HR managers could evaluate the objective qualities of employees

relative to their target position to avoid selecting those who were too overqualified. When managing current employees, training managers in HR departments could apply some measurement tools to evaluate and track their overqualification perception. For those who are identified as obviously overqualified, their direct leader could try to raise the demands or performance standards of their job to avoid presenting the negative side of the inverted U-shaped relation.

Second, as the moderating result of leader consultation shows, leaders play an active role in encouraging overqualified employees' voice behavior. Hence, managers who wish to encourage vocal participation by overqualified employees can try to enact active interaction with their subordinates. To achieve this goal, managers are advised to enhance employee engagement, which is essential to speaking up. When managers find that their subordinates feel overqualified, they can use a bottom-up leadership approach, such as using consultation as a means of encouraging overqualified employees to express their preferred selves.

Finally, the mediating effect of work engagement demonstrates that, for overqualified employees, work motivation rather than capacity is the key factor that shapes their proactive behavior. Thus, rather than focusing on task assignment according to employees' capabilities, managers should pay more attention to finding ways to enhance overqualified employees' motivation. For example, managers can recognize overqualified employees' personal values and nominate them as experts in their work teams. Such recognition enhances overqualified employees' motivation to contribute to their organizations (Danish & Usman, 2010).

Limitations and future directions

There are several limitations in this study. First, although we adopted a time-lagged design by measuring the independent variable and moderator at Time 1, the mediator at Time 2, and the dependent variable at Time 3, we cannot ensure causality. Longitudinal field studies or

experiments are recommended in future studies. Additionally, we recommend exploring the dynamic processes and dynamic changes in the influence of overqualification perceptions on voice behavior because employees could change their work content or patterns after speaking out, in turn shaping their perceptions of overqualification. Such potential dynamics should be tested to observe the unfolding process concerning how overqualification perceptions shape and are shaped by employee behavior.

We are also aware that our results may be influenced by cultural factors. Our sample is exclusively from China, which is characterized by a collectivist culture (Van de Vliert et al., 2013) in which individuals are more respectful of authority and avoid conflict with their leaders (Erdogan & Liden, 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) regardless of their overqualification perceptions. Being consulted by their leaders could be an extremely significant factor for overqualified employees expressing proactive voice in the workplace. The effect of leader consultation might thus be more salient in China than in Western cultures. Thus, more cross-cultural studies or other nonculturally related moderators should be explored in future research. In addition, other alternative moderators—such as leader affinity and leader trust, which may explain the effects of leader consultation—are recommended to be considered in future studies. In addition to leader consultation, other factors, such as subordinate interactions (Deng et al., 2018), career calling (Lobene & Meade, 2013), and organizational identification (Lin et al., 2017), could also influence overqualified employees' motivation to engage in voice behavior. Future studies can explore the potential moderating effects of these variables.

Our research measured overqualification using a subjective rather than objective approach. Employees might have inflated beliefs of their own abilities and qualifications, which may result in confounding between narcissism and overqualification. Although narcissism is linked to overconfidence (Campbell et al., 2004), it is distinct from perceived overqualification.

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Research by Maynard et al. (2015) reported only a weak correlation between narcissism and subjective overqualification. Moreover, the effects of narcissism and perceived overqualification on voice are different. Liu et al. (2017) found a negative relationship between narcissism and voice behavior, while our research found a curvilinear relationship between perceived overqualification and voice. Although our research controlled for general self-efficacy, which is the most relevant personal attribute reflecting self-confidence in employees' capabilities, we recognize that personality effects could be explored in future studies. In addition, as we did not collect employees' information regarding their work departments, we were unable to take the potential effects of departmental differences into account.

We also suggest that future studies extend our research by using the self-regulation perspective to understand the effects of perceived overqualification on other employee outcomes. For example, instead of focusing on just one behavior, future studies can investigate whether employees with different levels of perceived overqualification engage in profiles of behavior other than setting and striving toward challenging goals. Employees with relatively low levels of perceived overqualification might engage in more proactive but less counterproductive work behavior, whereas those with relatively high levels of perceived overqualification might engage in more counterproductive but not proactive behavior. Such an examination can help specify the effects of perceived overqualification on different behaviors. Furthermore, while we propose a self-regulation perspective in approaching the curvilinear effect of perceived overqualification on proactive voice for making additional contributions, we did not simultaneously examine both the self-regulation perspective and the self-concept perspective for person–job fit (Lin et al., 2017). Future studies are recommended to include both mechanisms to examine the differences between these two perspectives in accounting for the curvilinear effect of perceived overqualification on different types of proactive behavior.

CONCLUSION

Our research offers a self-regulation perspective to underpin the inverted U-shaped relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice, which is a representative of proactive behaviors that aim to change and improve the organization. Our findings demonstrate the mediating role of work engagement and the moderating role of leader consultation in the self-regulation process. Our insights provide researchers and managers with a new understanding of why and when overqualified employees will or will not strive to achieve challenging goals by utilizing their surplus capabilities. Future studies are encouraged to investigate the nonlinear effect of perceived overqualification on employee behavior.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] We also performed CFAs without item parceling. Similar to the finding we obtained with item parceling, the hypothesized measurement model (χ^2/df = 2.22, CFI = 0.88, TLI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.06, RMR = 0.08) is better than alternative models. Results are available upon request.

[2] We also performed CFAs without item parceling. Similar to the finding we obtained with item parceling, the hypothesized measurement model (χ^2/df = 1.71, CFI = 0.88, TLI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.07) is better than alternative models. Results are available upon request.

TABLE 1 Confirmatory factor analysis results (Study 1)

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$
Five-factor model	560.04	220	2.55	0.90	0.90	0.07	0.07	
Four-factor model[a]	821.08	224	3.67	0.83	0.81	0.10	0.09	261.04(4)***
Four-factor model[b]	813.80	224	3.63	0.83	0.81	0.10	0.08	253.76(4)***
Four-factor model[c]	806.02	224	3.58	0.84	0.82	0.09	0.08	245.98(4)***
Three-factor model[d]	1177.42	227	5.19	0.73	0.70	0.12	0.11	617.38(7)***
One-factor model[e]	2420.52	230	10.52	0.38	0.32	0.18	0.22	1860.48(10)***

Note: General self-efficacy and voice behavior were parceled into five items according to loadings.
[a] Combined perceived overqualification and leader consultation into one factor
[b] Combined perceived overqualification and general self-efficacy into one factor
[c] Combined perceived overqualification and psychological safety into one factor
[d] Combined perceived overqualification, general self-efficacy, and psychological safety into one factor
[e] Combined all of the variables into one factor

TABLE 2 Means, SDs, correlations among variables (Study 1)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Leader gender	1.17	0.38											
2 Leader tenure	12.09	6.96	0.25***										
3 Leader education	2.41	0.72	-0.15*	-0.52***									
4 Employee gender	1.31	0.46	0.54***	0.09	0.06								
5 Employee tenure	9.00	7.71	0.24***	0.62***	-0.51***	0.09							
6 Employee education	2.38	0.81	-0.35***	-0.48***	0.53***	-0.17**	-0.64***						
7 General self-efficacy	2.63	0.68	0.24***	-0.05	0.21***	0.24***	0.19**	-0.11*	*(0.91)*				
8 Psychological safety	3.31	0.68	0.22***	0.15*	0.04	0.12*	0.32***	-0.16**	0.42***	*(0.84)*			
9 Perceived overqualification	3.37	0.76	0.14*	-0.02	-0.05	0.10+	-0.05	-0.01	-0.15*	-0.13*	*(0.73)*		
10 Leader consultation	3.26	0.85	0.29***	0.28***	0.05	0.31***	0.39***	-0.14*	0.43***	0.53***	-0.05	*(0.84)*	
11 Constructive voice	3.30	0.90	0.12*	0.07	0.10	0.25***	0.12*	-0.01	0.28***	0.36***	-0.08	0.50***	*(0.91)*

Note: n = 293; SD = standard deviation. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Education: 1 = senior school and below; 2 = college degree; 3 = bachelor's degree and above. Cronbach's alpha in italics.
*$p < 0.05$
**$p < 0.01$
***$p < 0.001$

TABLE 3 Results of hierarchical linear modeling-based regression analysis (Study 1)

Variables	T3 Constructive voice			
	M1–1	M1–2	M1–3	M1–4
Intercepts	-0.96(0.38)	-0.96(0.39)	-0.79(0.38)	0.01(0.39)
Leader gender	-0.18(0.17)	-0.18(0.18)	-0.17(0.18)	-0.22(0.16)
Leader tenure	0.01(0.01)	0.01(0.01)	0.01(0.01)	-0.00(0.01)
Leader education	0.05(0.12)	0.05(0.12)	0.07(0.11)	-0.02(0.10)
Employee gender	0.43(0.14)**	0.43(0.14)**	0.40(0.14)**	0.29(0.13)*
Employee tenure	0.01(0.01)	0.01(0.01)	0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)
Employee education	0.13(0.08)	0.13(0.08)	0.12(0.08)	0.04(0.07)
General self-efficacy	0.15(0.08)	0.15(0.08)	0.16(0.08)	0.05(0.08)
Psychological safety	0.33(0.07)***	0.32(0.07)***	0.29(0.07)***	0.13(0.07)
T1 Perceived overqualification (PO)		-0.01(0.07)	-0.02(0.06)	-0.02(0.06)
T1 PO^2			-0.25(0.07)***	-0.20(0.06)**
T1 leader consultation (LC)				0.44(0.08)***
T1 PO × LC				0.14(0.06)*
T1 PO^2 × LC				-0.01(0.06)
ΔR^2	0.17	0.01(0.18)	0.03(0.21)	0.08(0.29)

Note: The findings were robust with and without all control variables in the equations. n = 293; all data are unstandardized estimates.
*$p < 0.05$
**$p < 0.01$
***$p < 0.001$

TABLE 4 Confirmatory factor analysis results (Study 2)

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$
Six-factor model	469.42	260	1.80	0.93	0.92	0.06	0.05	
Five-factor model[a]	891.95	265	3.37	0.79	0.76	0.10	0.10	422.53(5)***
Five-factor model[b]	886.86	265	3.35	0.79	0.76	0.10	0.10	417.44(5)***
Four-factor model[c]	1499.45	269	5.57	0.58	0.53	0.14	0.14	1030.03(9)***
Three-factor model[d]	1915.16	272	7.04	0.44	0.38	0.16	0.17	1445.74(12)***
One-factor model[e]	2474.66	275	9.00	0.25	0.19	0.19	0.18	2005.24(15)***

Note: Work engagement was parceled into three items according to its dimension. General self-efficacy and perceived overqualification were parceled into five items according to loadings.

[a] Combined perceived overqualification and leader consultation into one factor

[b] Combined perceived overqualification and work engagement into one factor

[c] Combined general self-efficacy, psychological safety, and work engagement into one factor

[d] Combined perceived overqualification and leader consultation into one factor, and general self-efficacy, psychological safety, and work engagement into one factor

[e] Combined all of the variables into one factor

TABLE 5 Means, SDs, correlations among variables (Study 2)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Leader gender	0.25	0.42												
2 Leader tenure	7.58	5.66	0.02											
3 Leader education	2.79	0.53	-0.06	-0.20**										
4 Employee gender	0.48	0.47	0.26***	-0.01	-0.09									
5 Employee tenure	4.06	4.35	0.06	0.18**	-0.12	-0.04								
6 Employee education	2.64	0.64	-0.05	0.13*	0.30***	-0.18**	-0.17**							
7 General self-efficacy	3.41	0.52	0.11	-0.19**	-0.12	0.04	0.06	-0.19**	*(0.86)*					
8 Psychological safety	3.67	0.72	-0.09	-0.02	-0.09	-0.01	-0.08	-0.14*	0.01	*(0.88)*				
9 Perceived overqualification	2.88	0.68	0.14*	-0.08	-0.12	0.03	0.05	-0.11	0.09	-0.17**	*(0.83)*			
10 Work engagement	3.89	0.63	-0.10	-0.08	-0.08	0.10	0.01	-0.12	0.11	0.20**	-0.14*	*(0.93)*		
11 Leader consultation	3.18	0.73	-0.03	-0.15*	0.06	0.09	0.03	-0.11	0.19**	0.33***	-0.13**	0.12	*(0.84)*	
12 Constructive voice	2.60	0.84	-0.13	-0.02	-0.06	-0.06	0.10	0.00	0.03	0.12	-0.03	0.27***	0.17**	*(0.84)*

Note: n = 231; SD = standard deviation. Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. Education: 1 = senior school and below; 2 = college degree; 3 = bachelor's degree; 4 = master's degree and above. Cronbach's alpha in italics.
*$p < 0.05$
**$p < 0.01$
***$p < 0.001$

TABLE 6 Results of hierarchical linear modeling-based regression analysis (Study 2)

Variables	T2 Work engagement			T3 Constructive voice				
	M2–1	M2–2	M2–3	M2–4	M2–5	M2–6	M2–7	M2–8
Intercepts	3.42(0.51)	3.37(0.46)	3.40(0.47)	1.93(0.74)	1.89(0.71)	0.87(0.78)	2.21(0.77)	1.37(0.83)
Leader gender	-0.16(0.09)	-0.10(0.08)	-0.08(0.08)	-0.24(0.17)	-0.20(0.16)	-0.17(0.16)	0.15(0.15)	-0.13(0.16)
Leader tenure	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.02)	-0.01(0.01)
Leader education	-0.10(0.08)	-0.11(0.07)	-0.10(0.08)	-0.11(0.14)	-0.12(0.14)	-0.09(0.13)	-0.13(0.13)	-0.11(0.13)
Employee gender	0.20(0.08)*	0.13(0.07)	0.08(0.07)	-0.04(0.13)	-0.10(0.13)	-0.14(0.13)	-0.19(0.12)	-0.21(0.13)
Employee tenure	0.01(0.01)	0.00(0.01)	0.00(0.01)	0.03(0.01)*	0.02(0.01)	0.02(0.01)	0.02(0.01)	0.02(0.01)
Employee education	-0.04(0.05)	-0.03(0.05)	-0.02(0.05)	0.12(0.10)	0.12(0.10)	0.13(0.10)	0.15(0.10)	0.15(0.10)
General self-efficacy	0.11(0.09)	0.17(0.08)*	0.16(0.08)*	0.05(0.11)	0.09(0.11)	0.04(0.11)	0.06(0.11)	0.02(0.01)
Psychological safety	0.13(0.06)*	0.15(0.05)**	0.14(0.05)**	0.15(0.07)*	0.16(0.07)*	0.11(0.07)	0.11(0.07)	0.08(0.07)
T1 Perceived overqualification (PO)	-0.12(0.09)	-0.10(0.08)	-0.13(0.06)*	-0.01(0.09)	-0.01(0.07)	0.04(0.08)	-0.02(0.08)	0.01(0.07)
T1 PO^2		-0.31(0.08)***	-0.30(0.07)***		-0.23(0.10)**	-0.14(0.08)	-0.24(0.08)**	-0.16(0.08)*
T1 leader consultation (LC)			0.07(0.07)				0.22(0.09)*	0.20(0.09)*
T1 PO × LC			0.24(0.10)**				0.36(0.12)**	0.31(0.12)*
T1 PO^2 × LC			0.03(0.19)				0.05(0.14)	0.04(0.16)
Work engagement						0.30(0.09)**		0.25(0.09)**
R^2	0.11	0.21	0.24	0.06	0.09	0.13	0.15	0.17
ΔR^2	0.02	0.10	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.02

Note: The findings were robust with and without all control variables in the equations. n = 231; all data are unstandardized estimates.
*$p < 0.05$
**$p < 0.01$
***$p < 0.001$

TABLE 7 Results of curvilinear moderation effect and curvilinear moderated mediation effect (Study 2)

		Curvilinear moderation effect					
		Low PO (-0.68)		Mean PO (0)		High PO (0.68)	
	Leader consultation	θ (S.E.)	90% CI	θ (S.E.)	90% CI	θ (S.E.)	90% CI
	Low level (-0.73)	0.14(0.25)	[-0.27, 0.54]	-0.30(0.10)	[-0.47, -0.13]	-0.73(0.20)	[-1.06, -0.41]
Work engagement	High level (0.73)	0.42(0.26)	[0.00, 0.85]	0.05(0.08)	[-0.09, 0.18]	-0.33(0.20)	[-0.66, 0.00]
	difference	-0.28(0.43)	[-0.98, 0.42]	-0.35(0.13)	[-0.57, -0.13]	-0.41(0.37)	[-1.02, 0.20]
Constructive voice	Low level (-0.73)	0.09(0.22)	[-0.28, 0.45]	-0.29(0.13)	[-0.51, -0.07]	-0.66(0.23)	[-1.03, -0.29]
	High level (0.73)	0.52(0.16)	[0.25, 0.78]	0.24(0.10)	[0.08, 0.41]	-0.03(0.22)	[-0.40, 0.33]
	difference	-0.43(0.27)	[-0.88, 0.02]	-0.53(0.18)	[-0.83, -0.23]	-0.63(0.38)	[-1.26, 0.00]
		Curvilinear moderated mediation effect					
		Low PO (-0.68)		Mean PO (0)		High PO (0.68)	
	Leader consultation	θ (S.E.)	90% CI	θ (S.E.)	90% CI	θ (S.E.)	90% CI
Constructive voice	Low level (-0.73)	0.08(0.07)	[-0.03, 0.20]	-0.09(0.05)	[-0.16, -0.03]	-0.27(0.10)	[-0.43, -0.10]
	High level (0.73)	0.09(0.06)	[0.02, 0.19]	0.02(0.03)	[-0.02, 0.07]	-0.04(0.05)	[-0.11, 0.04]
	difference	-0.01(0.11)	[-0.18, 0.17]	-0.12(0.05)	[-0.19, -0.04]	-0.23(0.12)	[-0.43, -0.03]

TABLE 8 Means, SDs, correlations for different voice behaviors (supplemental analyses)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 The measure of constructive voice in Study 1	2.89	0.89	*(0.94)*					
2 The measure of constructive voice in Study 2	2.92	0.94	0.84***	*(0.90)*				
3 Maynes and Podsakoff's constructive voice scale	3.03	0.84	0.75***	0.69***	*(0.91)*			
4 Supportive voice	3.39	0.82	0.62***	0.58***	0.72***	*(0.93)*		
5 Defensive voice	1.90	0.86	0.03	0.00	0.12+	-0.08	*(0.92)*	
6 Destructive voice	1.52	0.78	-0.04	-0.08	-0.04	-0.15*	0.70***	*(0.94)*

Note: n = 215; SD = standard deviation.

TABLE 9 Confirmatory factor analysis results (supplemental analyses)

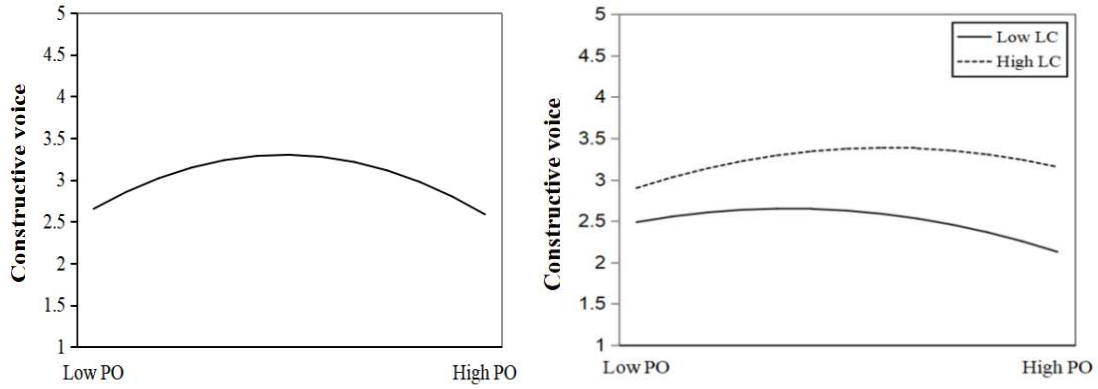| Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
Six-factor model	1025.86	449	2.28	0.91	0.90	0.07	0.08
Five-factor models:							
Combined the measures of constructive voice in Study 1 and Study 2	1080.36	454	2.38	0.91	0.90	0.07	0.08
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 1 and Maynes and Podsakoff's constructive voice scale	1275.08	454	2.81	0.89	0.88	0.08	0.08
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 2 and Maynes and Podsakoff's constructive voice scale	1222.51	454	2.69	090	0.89	0.07	0.08
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 1 and defensive voice	1933.58	454	4.26	0.78	0.76	0.16	0.12
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 1 and destructive voice	2253.16	454	4.96	0.73	0.70	0.17	0.14
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 2 and supportive voice	1410.89	454	3.11	0.86	0.84	0.09	0.10
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 2 and defensive voice	1934.29	454	4.26	0.78	0.76	0.16	0.12
Combined the measure of constructive voice in Study 2 and destructive voice	2242.74	454	4.93	0.73	0.70	0.17	0.14

Note: n = 215.
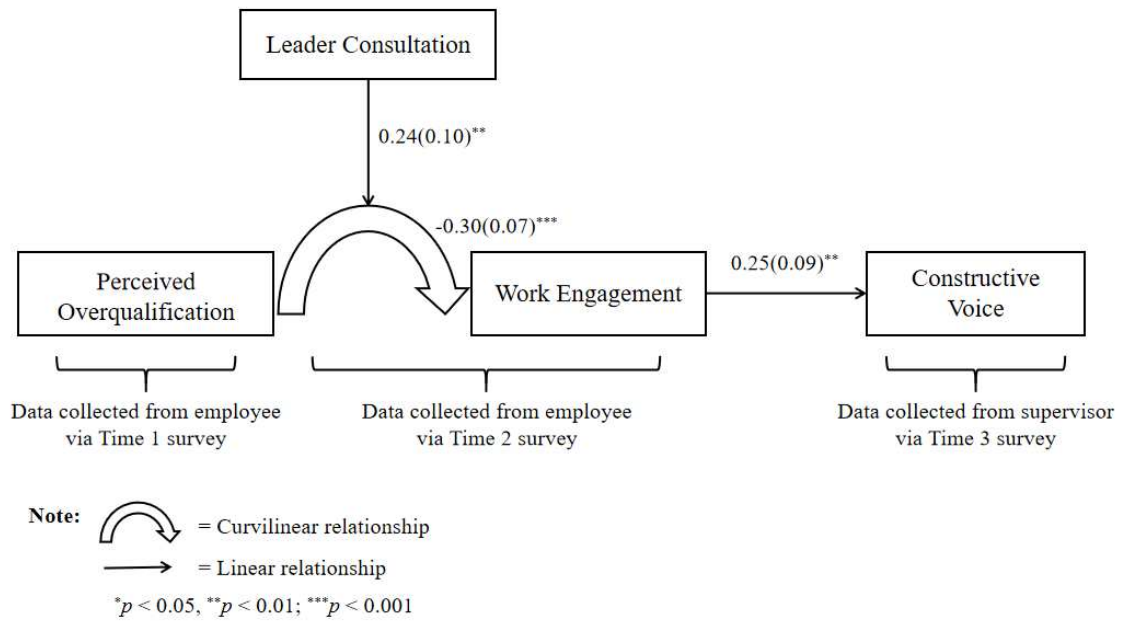
FIGURE 1 Hypothesized model, time points of measurements, and the unstandardized path coefficients in full model testing in Study 2

Estimated tangent slopes for Study 1

	Low POQ				High POQ
	X = 1	X = 2	X = 3	X = 4	X = 5
Study 1: POQ – Constructive voice (inflection point = 3.34)	1.55(0.39)***	0.89(0.22)***	0.23(0.07)**	-0.44(0.14)**	-1.10(0.31)***
Study 1: POQ – Constructive voice (low level of leader consultation)	1.04(0.38)**	0.54(0.22)*	0.04(0.08)	-0.46(0.12)***	-1.00(0.27)***
Study 1: POQ – Constructive voice (high level of leader consultation)	1.40(0.58)*	0.85(0.34)*	0.30(0.12)*	-0.25(0.19)	-0.80(0.42)†

Note: All data are unstandardized estimates. Values in the first row refer to the tangent slopes of the left-hand figure, and values on the second and the third rows refer to the tangent slopes of the right-hand figure.
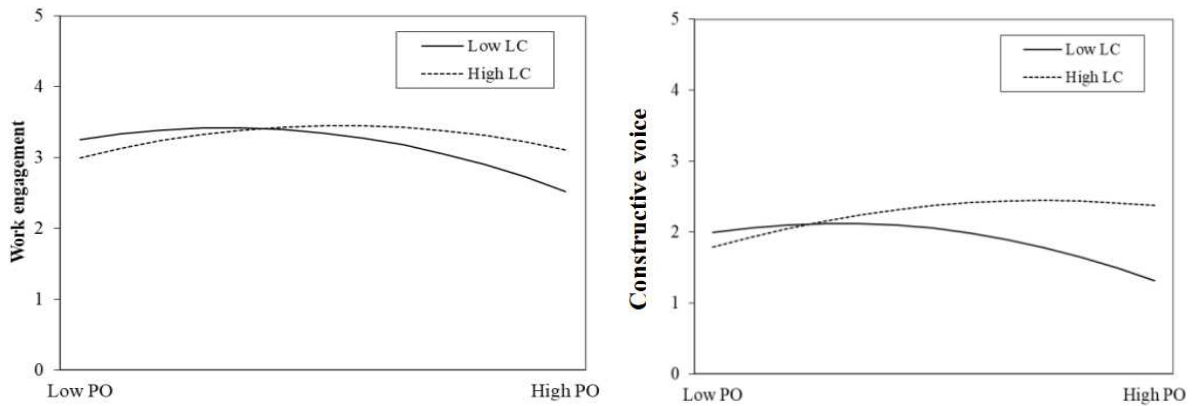
†$p < 0.10$
*$p < 0.05$
**$p < 0.01$
***$p < 0.001$

FIGURE 2 The curvilinear relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice (left) and moderating effect (right) of leader consultation (Study 1)

Estimated tangent slopes for Study 2

	POQ Low ⟵			⟶ POQ High	
	X = 1	X = 2	X = 3	X = 4	X = 5
Study 2: POQ – Work engagement (low level of leader consultation)	1.47(0.85)[†]	0.53(0.42)	-0.41(0.10)[***]	-1.35(0.47)[**]	-2.29(0.90)[*]
Study2: POQ – Work engagement (high level of leader consultation)	1.56(0.93)[†]	0.76(0.46)[+]	-0.05(0.08)	-0.86(0.50)[†]	-1.66(0.97)[†]
Study 2: POQ – Constructive voice (low level of leader consultation)	1.23(0.75)	0.42(0.25)	-0.39(0.14)[**]	-1.19(0.46)[**]	-2.00(0.84)[*]
Study 2: POQ – Constructive voice (high level of leader consultation)	1.35(0.64)[*]	0.77(0.30)[**]	0.17(0.12)	-0.42(0.45)	-1.01(0.80)

Note: All data are unstandardized estimates.
†*p* <0.10
*p < 0.05
**p < 0.01
***p < 0.001

FIGURE 3 Moderating effects of leader consultation on relationship between perceived overqualification and work engagement (left) and the relationship between perceived overqualification and constructive voice (right) (Study 2)