

Career adaptability and perceived overqualification: Testing a dual-path model among Chinese human resource management professionals



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ABSTRACT

Based on career construction theory, the current research examined the relationship between career adaptability and perceived overqualification among a sample of Chinese human resource management professionals ($N = 220$). The results of a survey study showed that career adaptability predicted perceived overqualification through a dual-path model: On the one hand, career adaptability positively predicted employees' perceived delegation, which had a subsequent negative effect on perceived overqualification. At the same time, career adaptability also positively predicted career anchor in challenge, which in turn positively predicted overqualification. This dual-path mediation model provides a novel perspective to understand the mechanisms through which career adaptability affects perceived overqualification, and demonstrates the coexistence of opposite effects in this process. In addition, the results also showed that the effects of perceived delegation and career anchor in challenge on perceived overqualification were stronger among employees with a higher (vs. lower) level of organizational tenure. These findings carry implications for both career development theories and organizational management practices.

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Perceived overqualification refers to the extent to which employees believe they possess surplus qualifications (e.g., education, experience, knowledge, skills, and abilities) relative to job requirements (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006). Perceived overqualification has been found to be associated with low job satisfaction (e.g., Fine & Nevo, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Maynard et al., 2006), high counter-productive behavior (Liu, Luksyte, Zhou, Shi, & Wang, 2014), high turnover intention (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013; Maynard et al., 2006; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), low organizational commitment (Bolino & Feldman, 2000; Maynard et al., 2006), and high psychological distress (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The problem of overqualification is particularly salient for many human resource management professionals as they often play operational roles, rather strategic roles in organizations (e.g. Guest & King, 2004).

In order to identify effective ways to attract, motivate and retain talents for organizations, it is important to examine the antecedents of perceived overqualification (Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró, & Truxillo, 2011a, 2011b; Maltarich, Reilly, & Nyberg, 2011; Sierra, 2011). This study aimed to address this gap by examining the relationship between career adaptability (Savickas, 1997, 2005, 2013) and perceived overqualification among Chinese human resource management professionals. Career adaptability refers to the psychological strengths

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that enable individuals to cope with the predictable and unpredictable challenges in their career development (Savickas, 1997, 2005, 2013). Career adaptability consists of four dimensions (Savickas, 2005, 2013), namely career concern (individuals' awareness of their future career possibilities), career control (individuals' strength of performing developmental tasks), career curiosity (individuals' strength of exploring various situations and roles) and career confidence (individuals' positive perceptions on their problem-solving skills).

Researchers have found that career adaptability plays an important role in helping individuals achieve various career goals, such as developing employability skills (de Guzman & Choi, 2013), pursuing employment opportunities (Guan et al., 2013, 2014) and career success (Guan, Zhou, Ye, Jiang, & Zhou, 2015). In this study, we argue that career adaptability may influence employees' perceived overqualification through two distinct mediation mechanisms. On the one hand, employees with high career adaptability can gain more delegation opportunities from their supervisors and their perceived delegation will subsequently reduce the feeling of overqualification (Chen & Aryee, 2007; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). On the other hand, we propose that a high level of career adaptability also enables employees to continuously seek new challenges and to overcome difficult problems, as captured by the career anchor in challenge (Schein, 1987, 1990). As a result, employees with a high level of career adaptability are more likely to perceive their current job duties as lacking of new challenges to utilize their abilities, and thus feel overqualified.

In sum, career adaptability may have mixed effects on perceived overqualification and the overall effect will depend on the relative strengths of the opposite mechanisms discussed above. In addition, as the perception of overqualification also involves employees' assessment of their working environments, we incorporated organizational tenure into the model and tested the moderation role of employees' organizational tenure on the relationships between the two mediators and perceived overqualification. We argue the effects of perceived delegation and career anchor in challenge on perceived overqualification were stronger among employees with a higher (vs. lower) level of organizational tenure. An investigation of this dual-path moderated-mediation model will advance current understanding on the antecedents of perceived overqualification, as well as the dynamic process through which career adaptability affects employees' perceived overqualification. The proposed model is shown in Fig. 1.

0.1. Career adaptability, perceived delegation and perceived overqualification

Perceived delegation represents the extent to which employees perceive that their supervisors empower them to take new responsibilities (Chen & Aryee, 2007). The level of delegation represents supervisors' recognition of the subordinates' job competence and problem-solving skills. Accordingly, previous research has revealed a positive relationship between employees' human capital (knowledge, skill and experience) and perceived empowerment (Scott, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). As career adaptability represents the self-regulatory resources that enable employees to develop relevant professional skills and to overcome the various difficulties in their work (Guo et al., 2014), employees with a high level of career adaptability are more likely to achieve good performance. For example, Ohme and Zacher (2015) found that career adaptability positively predicted employees' job performance (rated by supervisors), even when the effects of mental ability and conscientiousness were controlled for. Consequently, employees with a high level of career adaptability are more likely to be empowered by their supervisors for new work opportunities, and thus develop a high level of perceived delegation.

A high level of perceived delegation can promote the feeling of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact in one's work (Chen & Aryee, 2007; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Gkorezis, Hatzithomas, & Petridou, 2011). When delegated new work opportunities, employees believe they are valued by the organizations and feel that they can better determine work performance and achieve their career goals (Chen & Aryee, 2007; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). All these positive responses will significantly reduce employees' cognition that they are overqualified to their current work. We thus propose the following mediation hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Career adaptability positively predicts employees' perceived delegation, which in turn negatively predicts their perceived overqualification.

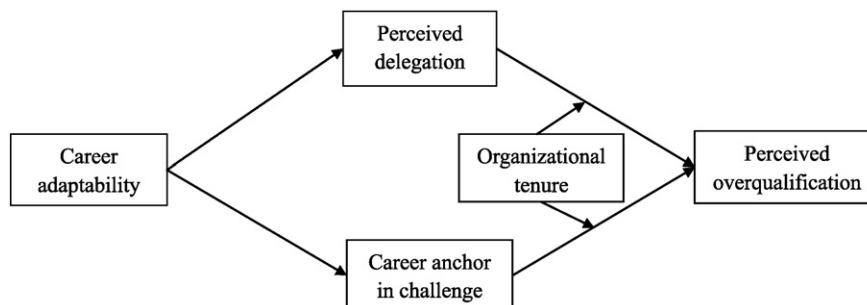


Fig. 1. The proposed model.

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