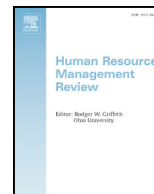




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Overqualified human resources, career development experiences, and work outcomes: Leveraging an underutilized resource with political skill

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ABSTRACT

We argue in this paper that overqualified employees represent an underutilized human resource that has the potential to be leveraged in impactful ways to enhance both personal and organizational effectiveness. Our proposed framework suggests that if organizations provide opportunities for employees to engage in career development experiences (i.e., job crafting, informal leadership, mentoring relationships), politically skilled overqualified employees will capitalize on these opportunities and utilize their additional knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience to make unique contributions, providing valued human resources to the organizations. Furthermore, the politically skilled overqualified employees' capitalization on opportunities to undertake career development opportunities will result in positive outcomes for both the employees (i.e., increased job satisfaction and reputation) and the organization (i.e., increased organizational commitment). Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

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Employees who are overqualified for their jobs are by no means a new workplace phenomenon, but it is a phenomenon that has increased in recent years as a function of both economic and social issues. The problem that has emerged is that because of anecdotal, hear-say, and innuendo evidence (i.e., and nothing more in the form of empirical data), hiring managers' attitudes (e.g., Green, 2013) often have led overqualified employees to become an underutilized human resource. Scholars have proposed that many factors (e.g., attributes of the applicant, social categories, and labor markets) may lead to the categorization of an applicant as overqualified, and that if the job is not knowledge intensive, or if there is not an established internal career ladder, hiring managers are more likely to categorize the applicant as overqualified (Martinez, Lengnick-Hall, & Kulkarni, 2014). As a result, they often are passed over in hiring decisions by interviewers in favor of much less talented candidates (Bewley, 1999), and when they are hired, their talents are rarely fully utilized in the way they could be in order to translate into effectiveness.

A major problem that emerges is that, in many cases, when overqualified individuals get hired, their additional human capital is never fully exploited or leveraged in ways that can enhance their own value to the organization, or contribute to increased effectiveness of the organization (Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Watt & Hargis, 2010). We suggest that organizations take flexible approaches to job crafting, informal leadership, and mentoring, as these activities represent career development experiences for the overqualified that can turn them into a highly valued human resource. This is because, when given the opportunity to undertake such career development experiences, the overqualified may demonstrate valuable extra-role capabilities, realize great personal benefits, and, in turn,

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become committed to the organization. The theory and research implications of this conceptualization intend to promote further empirical research on this important topic. The practical implication is to transform the overqualified from a liability vestige of economic downturns, into a valued asset that when effectively leveraged, can be a source of competitive advantage to organizations.

1. Theoretical model and background literature

The model we propose focuses on a very select group of employees, the overqualified, about which there has been considerable debate and speculation among both scholars and practitioners in recent years. Unfortunately, the speculation regarding this group of employees has been more negative than positive. Thus, we make an alternative argument, that the overqualified can represent an underutilized and potentially valuable human resource, that when properly utilized, can represent key contributors to organizational effectiveness.

Acquiring human resource talent with the ability to perform beyond a pre-determined set of tasks is becoming essential to organizational success (Cascio, 1995). Several scholars have proposed that organizations rethink traditional job analysis (e.g., Singh, 2008), and recognize idiosyncratic differences that can inform the development of work role agreements beyond a simple pre-determined job description (e.g., Stewart & Carson, 1997). In Fig. 1, we suggest that the overqualified may bring additional knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience to the workplace, which we argue represent special talents that can be leveraged to assist others and the organization.

We propose that organizations relax their job descriptions and allow overqualified employees opportunities to ‘job craft’ in ways that take on more duties and responsibilities that become part of their jobs. Then, we suggest that the potentially strong knowledge and skill base of the overqualified can enable them to engage in mentoring relationships, thus providing education and learning experiences that transmit both declarative as well as procedural knowledge to others (e.g., Campbell, 1990). Then, we argue the overqualified’s potential additional knowledge and skill base can enable them to serve as informal leaders, again assisting less knowledgeable and experienced employees regarding specific education about job execution, as well as providing planning and guidance. Furthermore, it is the political skill of some overqualified that explains the relationships we discuss in the model, and which enables these individuals to both recognize contextual opportunities, and then to capitalize on them.

Informal leadership roles and mentoring relationships are related activities that both can provide a degree of pseudo-seniority for overqualified employees. In the case of mentoring relationships, the overqualified take on roles in which they would provide guidance and support to protégés (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990). In the case of informal leadership roles, the overqualified utilize their distinctive competencies and experience to encourage colleagues to follow (Hill, 2004). In both positions (i.e., mentoring relationships and informal leadership roles) the overqualified do not need to hold formal senior roles in order to provide guidance, transfer knowledge, and gain support from colleagues. The overqualified employees’ additional skills, education and experience provide them with the resources to capably take on these visible and influential roles, without formal promotion. However, we argue that it is the political skill of some overqualified employees that enables them, when encouraged to job craft, to recognize opportunities to utilize their additional skills and experience via mentoring and informal leadership, and succeed in these expanded roles (Wihler, Blickle, Ellen, Hochwarter, & Ferris, in press).

This set of activities (i.e., job crafting, mentoring, and informal leadership) we construe as proactive career development experiences that, when properly implemented, can ultimately result in both positive individual and organizational outcomes. The politically skilled overqualified employees’ success throughout the proactive development experiences can positively affect their satisfaction with their newly expanded job responsibilities, and increase their reputation in the eyes of others. In turn, the overqualified’s increased satisfaction and personal reputation may lead to a greater commitment and attachment to the organization.

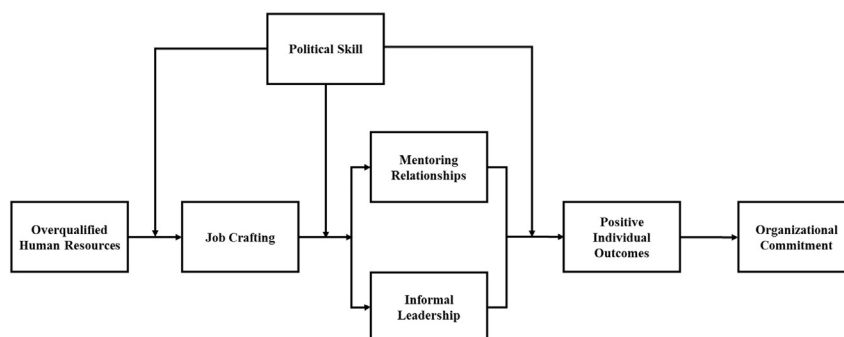


Fig. 1. Overqualification, career development experiences, and work outcomes.

2. Overqualified employees' career development experiences and the moderating role of political skill

2.1. Overqualification/underemployment

Overqualification, the focus of our proposed model, and underemployment are terms that some scholars have used interchangeably. However, two terms are distinct, and overqualification theoretically is a subset of underemployment that evaluates the practice of individuals accepting jobs which require less education, skill, and/or experience than they possess (e.g., Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard, 2006). Underemployment is a multi-dimensional construct, and most research, particularly in the management literature, evaluates one or two sub-dimensions. In an effort to clarify any misinterpretation that may arise regarding our use of the terms underemployment and overqualification, we offer a summation from a recent review of the topic which stated that “empirical distinctions among the dimensions have not been established” (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011, p. 974).

The multidimensionality of underemployment evolved from its interdisciplinary influences. In economics, the Labor Utilization Framework (LUF; Clogg & Sullivan, 1983) considered underemployment from the perspectives of time, wages, and mismatch. These broad categories inform the most widely accepted dimensions of underemployment in extant management research, where Feldman (1996) defined underemployment as the inability to obtain an adequate level of employment according to five underlying dimensions: education, experience, wages, involuntary job status, and involuntary job field (Feldman, 1996). While Feldman's categorization is the most commonly cited, researchers have conceptualized and operationalized underemployment in numerous ways (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011), all of which are varying components of time, wages, and mismatch.

Economists (Evans, 1915; Hodge & Wetzel, 1967) first investigated underemployment as a time and/or wage-related phenomenon that presented various challenges to the economic well-being of nations. Thus, the job status underemployment dimension is one of the earliest on record. Job status underemployment ensues when individuals involuntarily inhabit jobs whose hours are less than full-time or whose status is temporary, seasonal, or otherwise contingent. A general meta-analytic study that examined job attitudes of full-time and part-time employees showed that full-time employees exhibit more job involvement and that voluntary part-time individuals reported slightly more overall job satisfaction than involuntary part-time individuals (Thorsteinson, 2003). Further, Wilkins (2007) found that job status underemployment is negatively related to life satisfaction in addition to job satisfaction.

A second dimension of underemployment that arose from the economics literature is underpayment or wage underemployment. Wage underemployment is defined as earning a lower salary than one earned at a previous job or earning 20% less than peers in similar jobs (Feldman, 1996; Zvonkovic, 1988). Wage underemployment also has been associated with a decrease in hierarchical status or prestige in one's organizational position which often accompanies a decrease in salary (Feldman, Leana, & Bolino, 2002; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

The remaining primary dimensions of underemployment are directly related to overqualification, and involve some aspect of mismatch between skill, experience, and/or education level. Skill underutilization (i.e., skill mismatch), which is when an employee possesses more skills than the job requires, and overeducation (i.e., education mismatch), which is when an employee possesses a level of education that surpasses what the job requires (Groot & Van den Brink, 2000), often are studied together. Feldman et al. (2002), in a study that included wage/hierarchical underemployment and skill underutilization, found that skill underutilization was most detrimental to the employee's job attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational trust, careerism, and job search activities). Recently, other researchers (Badillo-Amador & Vila, 2013) reported similar findings, citing that skill underutilization proved more harmful than education mismatch when predicting wage and job satisfaction. Though Allen and van der Velden (2001) reported slightly different results on the strength of the skill underutilization – wages relationship, they did find that skill underutilization had a larger negative effect on job satisfaction and job search behaviors than education mismatch. While both education and skills mismatch are important, these findings suggest that neither should be used as a proxy for the other.

Overqualification is a conglomeration of underemployment sub-dimensions that evaluates mismatch between skill, experience, and education level in a holistic manner, as was suggested by other researchers (Allen & van der Velden, 2001; Badillo-Amador & Vila, 2013).

Erdogan, Bauer, Peiro, and Truxillo (2011) recently suggested that overqualification may arise involuntarily as a function of economic or social reasons, or voluntarily as a matter of personal choice, and often tends to be associated with lower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and increased turnover intentions (e.g., Lobene & Meade, 2013; Maynard & Feldman, 2011). Thus, it is plausible that overqualification may even prevail during periods of economic success. Such situations create an interesting, and somewhat controversial group of employees, which has stimulated considerable research activity in recent years (e.g., Bluestein, Kozan, & Connors-Kellgren, 2013; Fine & Nevo, 2011; Luksyte, Spitzmueller, & Maynard, 2011; Maynard & Feldman, 2011; Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013; Thompson, Shea, Sikora, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2013).

Scholars and practitioners alike have debated the consequences of overqualification, with many speculating that there can be negative effects on such individuals' social relationships, socioeconomic status, and psychological well-being (Burris, 1983; Dooley & Prause, 2004; Dooley, Prause, & Ham-Rowbottom, 2000; Feldman, 1996; McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). Although poor social relationships and psychological health may affect work attitudes and behaviors by extension, direct influences of overqualification have been shown to decrease job satisfaction (Maynard et al., 2006) and affective commitment (Johnson, Morrow, & Johnson, 2002).

Furthermore, Maynard and Parfyonova (2013) found that college graduates who were highly overqualified exhibited greater job search behaviors and were more likely to leave their jobs voluntarily than those who were not highly overqualified. Indeed, some practitioners have characterized the overqualified as high risk hires (Wells, 2004), suggesting they might reflect negative job attitudes, and demonstrate higher turnover when opportunities arise to secure employment more commensurate with their qualifications. Although negative job attitudes and work behaviors of employees should be of great concern to organizations, we caution against blindly categorizing all overqualified employees as undesirable.

Extant research suggests that various job facets may serve to ameliorate the negative influences of overqualification on job attitudes and work behaviors. Researchers have found that low job satisfaction did not lead to voluntary turnover among overqualified employees in jobs that required lower cognitive demands, perhaps due to increased perceptions of work flexibility (Maltarich, Nyberg, & Reilly, 2010). Other researchers found empowerment attenuates the negative influence of overqualification on turnover, job satisfaction, and intentions to remain (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). Thus, perhaps we should focus less on hiring “a mediocre worker to ensure that they stay for a long time,” as suggested by Erdogan and Bauer (2011, p. 222).

2.2. Job crafting

Research on job design (Grant & Ashford, 2008) and work role adjustment (Black & Ashford, 1995) was extended by the notion that employees could take a more proactive role in designing their jobs. The notion of job crafting embodies the idea that employees can utilize proactive career development experiences to alter aspects of their jobs. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001, p. 179) formally defined job crafting as the “physical and cognitive changes individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work,” thereby suggesting that the boundaries of a particular job are malleable and may exceed the tasks outlined in the job description. Thus, job crafting has physical, cognitive, as well as relational components.

Physical job crafting involves altering the breadth of the assigned job tasks while relational job crafting allows employees to extend and control the scope of their social interactions at work. Viewing one's job holistically, or as a conglomeration of different activities, is a function of cognitive job crafting. Engaging in physical, relational, or cognitive job crafting affords employees the ability to acquire additional responsibilities, build social networks, and/or perceptually separate desirable and undesirable job tasks (Wrzesniewski, Berg, & Dutton, 2010). Further, job crafting is a function of the employee, and may be accomplished with or without the permission of the organization. Often, employees engage in job crafting in an effort to increase positive job attitudes and behaviors, such as job satisfaction, meaningfulness of work, and job engagement (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

As the overall goal of job crafting is to increase person-job fit perceptions (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), organizations might be able to provide additional latitude to overqualified employees by permitting them the discretion to job craft by taking on more duties, responsibilities, and assignments in ways whereby they essentially can mold an expanded (and enriched) job. Job crafting is closely related to other areas of research that investigate taking initiative, discretionary work effort, and extra-role behaviors and, subsequently, research has demonstrated a number of positive outcomes in the workplace (Wrzesniewski et al., 2010).

Job crafters report greater job attachment and lower turnover intentions (Leana, Appelbaum, & Shevchuk, 2009), and employees who engage in relational job crafting have showed increased motivation and job performance (Grant, 2007). Research also suggests that collaborative job crafting (i.e., job crafting undertaken in partnership with others) is even more effective than individual job crafting. Thus, we assert that organizations and employees should seek to align their efforts to achieve individual and organizational goals by creating an environment where job crafting behavior is viewed as instrumental in individual and organizational success. This is particularly relevant for overqualified employees, as they may have an abundance of skills and knowledge, and are likely capable of taking on extra-role activities without hindering their in-role performance.

Research has exhibited that turnover intentions and overall job performance varies among overqualified employees (Maltarich et al., 2010), and that overqualified employees who feel in control and empowered experience greater job satisfaction, intentions to remain, and demonstrate less voluntary turnover (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). We propose that overqualified employees who job craft may be able to utilize excess skills through expanding the physical, cognitive, and relational scope of their jobs in informal, yet practical, ways. We argue that efforts such as job crafting can provide many benefits, both for the overqualified employees and the organization.

2.3. Political skill's moderating role

Ferris et al. (2005, p. 127) defined political skill as “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives.” Further, they proposed political skill includes four dimensions (i.e., interpersonal influence, social astuteness, apparent sincerity, and networking ability) that allow those who possess it to more effectively navigate organizational landscapes. Politically skilled individuals are able to read situations and social interactions and utilize influence techniques in a sincere way to network effectively and obtain desired outcomes from interactions with others. They also are able to adjust their behavior and interpersonal communication techniques to meet the requirements of different situations. People who are high in political skill know how and when to act as situations change, and they have the wherewithal to do it in a manner that is regarded approvingly by others.

Previous research has found political skill is positively related to many individual outcomes. These include job performance (e.g., Blickle et al., 2011, 2013; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, in press), power (e.g., Treadway et al., 2013), the ability to alleviate stress (Perrewé et al., 2004, 2005), and the ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities (McAllister, Ellen, Perrewé, Ferris, & Hirsch, 2015; Wihler et al., in press). These latter two outcomes (i.e., the ability to alleviate stress and the ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities) are of particular interest to the current study.

As mentioned earlier, the role conflict often associated with overqualification can result in strained social relationships and negative effects on psychological health (Dooley & Prause, 2004; Dooley et al., 2000). Research demonstrates that political skill helps to attenuate the negative effects of role conflict (Perrewé et al., 2004). Perrewé and colleagues found that both psychological strain (i.e., increased anxiety and somatic complaints) and physiological strain (i.e., increased heart rate and blood pressure) were reduced when individuals possessed high levels of political skill. This is important, as politically skilled overqualified employees who can better

overcome the potential strain and stress that is associated with overqualification likely can better utilize and capitalize on their additional skills and experience than can those overqualified employees who are less politically skilled.

The politically skilled's increased ability to recognize opportunities, and to then capitalize on these opportunities, also has great implications for the current study. *Wihler et al. (in press)* found that politically skilled individuals' increased social astuteness better enables them to recognize opportunities to take initiative. These politically skilled individuals are then better able to capitalize on these opportunities than are those who are less politically skilled. We suggest here that it is not just organizations' efforts to provide job crafting opportunities to the overqualified; it also is the overqualified's astute reading of environmental contexts, and proactive seeking out of such experiences in effective ways that needs to occur. That is, overqualified individuals who possess political skill and thus the increased ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities (*Wihler et al., in press*), likely will make these things happen and be the beneficiaries of this proactive behavior.

We propose that politically skilled overqualified employees will possess the capacity to recognize opportunities to utilize career development experiences to enhance their standing within the organization in ways that less politically skilled employees cannot. By hiring politically skilled overqualified individuals, organizations can gain employees who may seek to better themselves and simultaneously improve the organization. Politically skilled overqualified employees likely will seek to job craft in ways that provide them with visible and influential roles that demonstrate their potential additional skills and experience in ways that lead to personal and career growth within the organization.

Proposition 1. *Political skill moderates the relationship between overqualification and job crafting in such a way that higher political skill strengthens the positive relationship between overqualification and job crafting, as those lower in political skill are less likely to recognize the benefits of job crafting.*

Mentoring. Mentoring is traditionally conceptualized as the relationship between a senior employee and a protégé for whom the senior employee provides guidance, knowledge, and assistance in the protégé's personal development (e.g., *Ragins & McFarlin, 1990*). The mentor also will often provide the protégé with career and social support to assist with the goal of enhancing the protégé's future prospects (*Thomas & Kram, 1988*). Overqualified individuals often may possess the skills and experience of more senior employees, and the ability to act as mentors to junior-level, same-level, or even more senior-level colleagues.

Politically skilled overqualified employees may job craft in such a way as to take on a mentoring role for several reasons. Social exchange theory posits, out of norms of reciprocity, that in exchange for allowing them to job craft, the overqualified would feel obligated to give something back to the organization (*Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005*). By taking on mentoring roles, the overqualified can provide guidance and support to others within the organization, and contribute positively to the overall success and performance of the organization.

The politically skilled and overqualified also may have other mixed motivations to take on mentoring roles. While the mentoring relationship provides many benefits to the protégé (*Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004*), it also can provide many benefits to the mentor (*Ghosh & Reio, 2013*). The overqualified may be motivated to take on mentoring roles because they enjoy the social interaction and building of relationships with work colleagues. In addition, when the overqualified are politically skilled they are socially astute and excellent networkers, and the development of social relationships through mentoring allows them to gain access to important information about the organization (*Mullen, 1994*) and develop relationships with protégés that could later provide backing. This better enables the politically skilled overqualified employee to network, understand the interactions of others within the organization, and utilize influence when necessary.

Mentoring also allows the overqualified to engage protégés in active socialization experiences where they can gain valuable declarative and procedural knowledge (e.g., *Campbell, 1990; Yang, Hu, Baranik, & Lin, 2012*). The politically skilled and overqualified may be motivated to take on mentoring relationships as such experiences can provide a number of psychological as well as tangible career benefits for mentors (e.g., *Allen, Lentz, & Day, 2006*). When selecting protégés, the politically skilled often select individuals who possess certain qualities and are likely to succeed (*Blass & Ferris, 2007*), which enables the politically skilled to place themselves in positions where they can receive recognition from colleagues and superiors (*Kram, 1985*).

We argue that politically skilled overqualified employees are more likely to recognize the potential benefits of mentoring relationships. By taking on mentoring relationships, they not only appear thankful and sincere by giving back to the organization for allowing them to job craft, but they also gain great benefit (e.g., increased information, networking abilities, and recognition). When given the opportunity to job craft and utilize the flexibility of their malleable job descriptions, politically skilled overqualified employees are more likely to seek out mentoring relationships that enable them to demonstrate their appreciativeness while also gaining multiple benefits.

Proposition 2. *Political skill moderates the relationship between job crafting and mentoring in such a way that higher political skill strengthens the positive relationship between job crafting and taking on mentoring relationships.*

2.4. Informal leadership

Informal leaders play important roles in most organizations. They “emerge through a complex process of role taking and peer perceptual processes that determine who becomes leaders” (*Neubert & Taggar, 2004, p. 176*). Research found informal leadership qualities include confidence, communication, willingness, positive attitude, knowledge, and organization (*Stincelli & Baghurst, 2014*).

Because of these high skill, respect, and credibility levels, informal leaders can “lead from behind” by using their unique competencies and experience to encourage collective action among followers (Hill, 2004; Stincelli & Baghurst, 2014).

Overqualified employees may possess the additional knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively take on informal leadership roles. Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, and Treadway (2003) proposed that informal leadership is determined by coworker's perceptions of the leader, and whether the informal leader behaves in the ways corresponding with what the coworkers perceive leaders to be. The perceptual nature of informal leadership is important, as potential followers may perceive the overqualified as more credible leaders when compared to other employees.

The perceptual nature of informal leadership also is important because perceptions can be influenced. By communicating their excess skills and experience, it is likely that the politically skilled overqualified employees are able to influence others' perceptions, and lead others to perceive them as leaders. Research demonstrates that politically skilled individuals often are more effective at taking appropriate actions and utilizing appropriate influence techniques effectively (Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). The politically skilled also are better than those with low levels of political skill at networking and building support from others (Ferris et al., 2007). The ability of politically skilled overqualified employees to effectively communicate their excess skills and knowledge, garner support, and persuade others that they are leaders is important, as some researchers have proposed leaders are only in the minds of followers (e.g., Offerman, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994).

In addition to more effectively communicating their excess skills, and persuading others to perceive them as leaders, we argue that politically skilled overqualified employees are more likely to recognize and capitalize on opportunities to take on informal leadership roles (Wihler et al., in press). Political skill enables individuals to interpret and understand the social interactions of others, and determine the motives behind others' behavior in the workplace (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012). Possessing political skill not only allows overqualified individuals to recognize leadership opportunities, but it likely increases their chances of successfully inhabiting informal leadership roles and persuading others to accept them as leaders.

We argue that politically skilled overqualified employees likely are better able to tactfully communicate their previous experience and skills and persuade others to acknowledge them as leaders. Allowing overqualified employees to job craft permits them the latitude to seek out experiences that further develop their careers, and political skill better enables them to recognize opportunities for visible and influential informal leadership roles. In addition, once in the informal leadership roles, political skill better enables overqualified individuals to succeed and perform at high levels.

Proposition 3. *Political skill moderates the relationship between job crafting and informal leadership in such a way that higher political skill strengthens the positive relationship between job crafting and taking on informal leadership roles.*

3. Outcomes of career development experiences and the moderating role of political skill

We argue that the interaction of overqualification and political skill provides individuals with great success potential. Not only, when given the flexibility, will these employees be better able to recognize opportunities to job craft, but they likely will do so in ways that allow them to suitably utilize their potential excess knowledge, skills, and experience in important and influential ways (i.e., engage in mentoring relationships and informal leadership roles). Further, those who are both overqualified and politically skilled are much more likely to successfully undertake these career development opportunities, and, in turn, realize positive outcomes that provide great benefit to both themselves and the organization.

3.1. Job satisfaction

The mentoring process can provide numerous benefits for both protégés and mentors. From the mentor's view, these benefits include developing personal relationships with protégés, increased mentor learning, greater personal satisfaction and gratification from watching their protégé's success, and enhanced managerial skills from interactions with their protégés (Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Parise & Forret, 2008). Additional mentor benefits include protégés becoming trusted allies and reliable supporters, mentors receiving acknowledgment from the organization, and an increased sense of accomplishment (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997; Kram, 1985; Parise & Forret, 2008; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). Finally, protégés can improve their mentor's job performance by providing mentors with new perspectives, skills, and knowledge (Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Parise & Forret, 2008; Mullen & Noe, 1999).

These benefits highlight the potential relationship between mentoring and the mentor's own job satisfaction. Clearly, increased mentor fulfillment, gratification, competence, accomplishment, recognition, and job performance all are likely to lead to greater mentor job satisfaction. As mentors realize the many benefits gained from protégé interactions, it is reasonable to assume that their personal job satisfaction increases as each mentoring benefit accrues over time.

This mentoring–job satisfaction relationship likely is moderated by political skill. A political skill perspective assumes that individuals will use their personal resources and interpersonal skills to advance their own personal job success (Shaughnessy, Treadway, Breland, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2011). Similarly, previous research demonstrates that politically skilled mentors select protégés they believe have the ability to succeed, and that can bring desirable skillsets and personality traits to the relationship. Selecting such individuals as protégés often enables the mentor to reap greater rewards (Allen, Poteet, & Russell, 2000; Blass & Ferris, 2007; Young & Perrewé, 2000). Politically skilled overqualified employees are likely to enter mentoring relationships with individuals they know have a better chance of succeeding and, in turn, have a better chance of providing the mentor positive benefits and satisfaction.

Although research of informal leaders is sparse relative to that of formal leaders (Bryman, 2004), the research that does exist suggests overqualified employees who take on informal leadership positions also are likely to experience higher job satisfaction levels. For example, research has found that informal leaders are more involved than formal leaders in team mission development and planning (Pielstick, 2000). Also, in certain circumstances, these leaders may exert a greater influence than formal leaders over an organization's leadership process because of their high respect and credibility levels (Chan & Chan, 2005). It is likely, due to potential increased knowledge and skillsets, that overqualified employees are able to have great influence on organizational proceedings, and to guide the organization in directions they favor. As informal leaders' organizational impact increases, their resulting job satisfaction also is likely to increase.

Political skill can further affect these relationships. For example, informal leaders' performance is likely contingent upon their political skill (Shaughnessy et al., 2011). Further, as described by Blass and Ferris (2007, p. 15), "a political theory of leadership suggests that the ability to effectively read, understand, and control social interactions is central to leader effectiveness." Accordingly, because political skill enhances the ability to effectively read situations (Ferris et al., 2005) and selectively take on powerful informal leadership roles, and to then be effective in such roles, political skill also likely influences the relationship between informal leadership and the job satisfaction resulting from exercising that leadership.

3.2. Personal reputation

Ragins and Scandura (1999) suggested mentoring could have both a positive or negative effect on reputation, depending on the mentoring relationship's outcome. We propose that overqualified employees may possess the skills, knowledge, and experience to be successful mentors, as they may be able to provide protégés with guidance and information other less qualified mentors could not. Successful vocational training by mentors, through which protégés are exposed to expertise and new perspectives, is significantly related to protégé perceived learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Protégé learning, in turn, leads to increased protégé performance, job satisfaction, and reductions in protégé turnover. When overqualified employees contribute to successful mentoring relationships which result in positive protégé outcomes, there likely will be a positive effect on the overqualified employees' reputations.

Blass and Ferris (2007) proposed reputation development can be achieved through the process of mentoring and political skill development, resulting in positive impressions on others. Reputation is highly perceptual in nature and based on individuals' past performances (Ferris et al., 2014). As mentors see the positive effect of their mentoring efforts on their protégé's job performance (Allen et al., 2004), they may use their political skill to positively influence their own job performance ratings and organizational reputation as well as their protégé's (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002; Munyon et al., in press). Treadway et al. (2014) found politically skilled individuals can better leverage past performances to increase reputation. Politically skilled overqualified employees are likely able to create positive mentoring relationships, and then effectively leverage the success of the mentoring relationship to enhance their personal reputation. Relative to less politically skilled overqualified employees, the added abilities of the politically skilled likely will enable them to communicate their successes in sincere and effective ways that result in increased reputation.

Although there is very little research investigating the role of informal leadership on reputation, the literature that does exist indicates those who offer leadership in open settings can increase their reputation. Investigating the role of technical contributions to open innovation communities, Fleming and Waguespack (2007) found strong support for their hypothesis that an individual who is able to provide answers and explanations for others in a group can gain a positive reputation as a leader. This relates very closely to the idea of overqualified employees possessing the ability to provide technical and informative answers for their colleagues. The potential additional education and skills they possess often can provide them with knowledge and answers that others may not have.

Shaughnessy et al. (2011) found informal leaders are much more likely to be successful and to perform well when they possess political skill. Political skill gives individuals increased ability to navigate organizational settings (Ferris et al., 2007). It is likely that, when taking on informal leadership roles, overqualified employees could experience some push-back from formal leaders and fellow lower-level employees. Jealousy and ego preservation could lead some employees to regret a new overqualified employee taking on an informal leadership role. Individuals with increased levels of political skill would be better able to negotiate potential conflicts and succeed in informal leadership roles. Overqualified employees who take on informal leadership roles, but do not possess the political skill necessary to deal with different stakeholders in the organization are less likely to succeed and are more likely to have their reputations affected in a negative way.

If the overqualified employees are able to take on informal leadership roles, they likely will build their social capital and gain access to higher social networks. This is important because research has found that the social network ties of group leaders affect their reputation (Mehra, Dixon, Brass, & Robertson, 2006). If overqualified employees are able to utilize political skill to more effectively present their informal leadership successes (Treadway et al., 2014) to higher social network ties, they also are likely able to gain access to power (Treadway et al., 2013). Power can be used to gain access to additional resources that increase reputation (Pfeffer, 1992). Politically skilled overqualified employees' ability to take on informal leadership roles, navigate the potential conflicts that may arise from taking on such roles, and utilize performance in such roles to gain access to power and influence, likely will positively affect their reputation.

In sum, the overqualified often possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to successfully take-on mentoring and informal leadership roles. However, simply possessing these enhanced qualities will not always equal high performance. The aptitude to know how and when to employ extra abilities is essential, and several authors (e.g., Blickle et al., 2008; Treadway et al., 2013) have found political skill to be positively related to performance. Political skill enhances the overqualifieds' abilities to perform at high levels and to

effectively communicate knowledge of this performance. The result likely is a strengthened relationship between career development experiences (i.e., mentoring relationships and informal leadership roles) and increased job satisfaction and personal reputation.

Proposition 4. *Political skill moderates the relationship between mentoring relationships and positive individual outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and personal reputation) in such a way that higher political skill strengthens the positive relationship between mentoring relationships and positive individual outcomes.*

Proposition 5. *Political skill moderates the relationship between informal leadership and positive individual outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and personal reputation) in such a way that higher political skill strengthens the positive relationship between informal leadership and positive individual outcomes.*

3.3. Organizational commitment

Although organizational commitment can be considered a positive individual outcome, here we highlight its role as a positive organizational outcome. Lack of organizational commitment and increased turnover often are associated with overqualification (Maynard & Feldman, 2011). This may be one of the reasons that organizations frequently opt to not hire overqualified applicants. In the proposed model we argue that career development experiences will result in increased job satisfaction for the politically skilled and overqualified. The increased satisfaction that mentors often experience is strongly related to a key concern of organizations when hiring the overqualified: commitment. Because individuals need to feel satisfied with their job before they can feel committed, job satisfaction typically is seen as one of the antecedents of organizational commitment (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010; Mathieu & Hamel, 1989). As overqualified employees job craft, take on mentoring relationships, and, in turn, experience increased job satisfaction, they are likely also to feel greater commitment to the organization (Ghosh & Reio, 2013).

An increased personal reputation also may lead to increased organizational commitment. Research has shown that a positive reputation can affect promotion considerations and decisions (Ferris et al., 2014). A positive reputation also is linked to positive outcomes such as compensation (Wade, Porac, Pollock, & Graffin, 2006), behavioral discretion (Diamond, 1989), and power (Pfeffer, 1992). Although these positive outcomes may not immediately result from the increased reputation, the politically skilled overqualified individuals likely are aware of the relationships between their increased reputation and positive outcomes. Such employees frequently have additional experience, and their increased social astuteness and ability to read situations likely enables them to observe and comprehend such reputation–outcome relationships in previous situations. These employees will understand that commitment to the organization likely will result in further positive individual outcomes.

The overqualified also may feel great gratitude to the organization, and feel obligated to give back to the organization in the form of increased commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The politically skilled and overqualified are very socially astute, and they likely understand that the organization made concessions for them to job craft in such ways that they could use their additional experience, skills and abilities. As the politically skilled overqualified employees utilize the role flexibility granted by the organization to recognize opportunities to take on leadership and mentoring roles, and, in turn, experience increased job satisfaction and personal reputation, they likely will be appreciative of the flexibility provided by the organization.

In sum, encouraging the overqualified employees to job craft will provide opportunities for those who possess political skill to do so in ways that are both beneficial to the employee and the organization. The mentoring and informal leadership roles that the politically skilled overqualified employees take-on often will lead to increased job satisfaction and personal reputation. These employees may then feel indebted to the organization, and increase organizational commitment, addressing one of the primary concerns organizations have regarding the hiring of overqualified employees (Maynard & Feldman, 2011).

Proposition 6. *Positive individual outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction and personal reputation) are positively related to the politically skilled overqualified employees' commitment to the organization.*

4. Discussion

4.1. Contributions to theory and research

Our proposed model addresses calls by authors (e.g., Feldman, 2011) to explain individuals' behavioral outcomes. Feldman called for future work to investigate the ways employees may seek to improve their work situations, improve their psychological distress, and how they may behave with regard to on-job performance. We argue that, when provided the opportunity, overqualified employees who possess political skill seek to improve their work situations by job crafting. With increased flexibility they are able to recognize and take on visible and influential mentoring and informal leadership roles, leading to several positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, enhanced reputation, and organizational commitment. Politically skilled overqualified employees possess the ability to help the organization in ways that typically are too difficult for other employees in the same position. We argue that rather than perform at a merely satisfactory level (Bolino & Feldman, 2000), overqualified employees, when allowed to take on increased roles, can benefit both the organization and themselves.

Our model also expands on the literature addressing the career trajectory and advancement paths of overqualified employees. Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, and Martinez (2015) found that in the right context, organizations will hire an overqualified applicant “for

the organization” rather than “for the job,” and if the organization often promotes from within. Once in an organization, [Erdogan and Bauer \(2011\)](#) proposed that social skills may assist and promote the advancement path of the overqualified. We propose that it is the overqualified employees' possession of political skill that moderates their career development experiences. Possessing political skill allows individuals to better navigate the organization ([Ferris et al., 2007](#)), and, in doing so, allows them to recognize and take advantage of potential career development experiences. We propose that when the overqualified employees utilize these career development experiences, they will recognize increased reputation and the potential for new challenging assignments and promotion within the organization. Their advancement potential is increased, and they are more likely to experience job and career satisfaction.

Furthermore, our model demonstrates new ways political skill may benefit individuals in organizations. Expanding on the literature demonstrating how political skill allows individuals to understand others and their interactions at work ([Ferris et al., 2007](#)), we propose that political skill allows individuals to recognize and take advantage of opportunities that arise in the organization around them ([Wihler et al., in press](#)). We argue that politically skilled overqualified employees are better able to read the organizational landscape, see opportunities to job craft, and advocate to their superiors for more flexible job descriptions. Further, once the expanded autonomy is gained, political skill will allow the overqualified to demonstrate additional skills and experience in effective ways via mentoring relationships and informal leadership roles. These expanded visible roles and the ability to succeed in them due to their qualifications and political skill will result in benefits to the individual. Together, the career development experiences pathway we propose and the moderating effects of political skill demonstrate new and exciting ways political skill helps individuals succeed in organizations.

A final contribution we need to mention concerns the appeal for research exploring the situational context of political skill ([Ferris et al., 2012](#)). Ferris and colleagues argued that because a frequently discussed assumption about politically skilled employees is that they can successfully adjust their behavior or adapt to situations (e.g., [Ferris et al., 2007](#)), often ignored is the fact that the politically skilled also proactively alter, enact, or shape their own environments as well, playing an active large role in shaping the enacted ([Weick, 1969](#)), or social, environment of work. Thus, the present conceptualization begins to explore the processes by which politically skilled employees shape their own work environments through job crafting and job description expansion.

4.2. Directions for future research

An initial direction for future research is to test all or portions of the conceptualization we proposed regarding the more effective utilization of overqualified human resources. We are particularly interested in how political skill might allow the overqualified to more astutely read their work environments in ways that allow them to recognize and then capitalize on opportunities in their work context. This particular social effectiveness competency might equip overqualified employees with the means to rise out of their otherwise underutilized and potentially dissatisfying existence, and proactively create or enact a newly defined job context; that is, one that is more valuable for the organization, and personally satisfying for the overqualified employees.

However, in addition to political skill, we encourage researchers in future work to also examine other types of social effectiveness competencies. For example, [Erdogan and Bauer \(2011\)](#) called for research on social skill as a moderator of overqualification–work outcomes relationships. Also, [Fleig-Palmer, Luthans, and Mandernach \(2009\)](#) suggested that ‘resiliency’ is a potentially valuable attribute of job seekers who are seeking reemployment, which might include the overqualified. Much like political skill operates, resiliency makes people more adaptable to contextual conditions, and they have the flexibility to adjust to new and changing situations, which makes for more versatile human resources.

5. Conclusion

Overqualification in the workplace is a phenomenon that has been around since the beginning of organizations. Unfortunately, very little action has been taken to recognize this as a possible problem, and propose remedial suggestions for how to address it. Our proposed framework suggests that overqualified employees can be valuable human resources if organizations provide the proper developmental career experiences for them to make unique contributions. We argue that the overqualified (i.e., particularly those who are overqualified because of past work experience) have knowledge, skills, and abilities that, if career development experiences are made available to these employees, can be leveraged to aid the organization.

Such career enhancing activities include allowing them to job craft by expanding their job duties and responsibilities to incorporate mentoring others and serving as informal leaders in ways that contribute meaningfully to the organization, and render them as valuable human resources. We suggest that such activities not only render overqualified employees as more valuable assets to organizations, but these career development experiences positively affect these employees' satisfaction and organizational commitment, which likely decreases the turnover that can impact these employees. We hope this conceptual framework stimulates more research attention to this important topic, helps to inform career development considerations for special groups of employees like the overqualified, and demonstrates how the current status of the overqualified in organizations as a vastly underutilized and underappreciated resource does not have to remain that way.

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