

## DOCTORAL THESIS

# Overqualified for a Job or Work Role? A Role Theory Perspective on Antecedents and Consequences of Perceived Overqualification

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## **Abstract**

The research on perceived overqualification has largely assumed that perceived overqualification is shaped by the comparison between employees' qualifications and qualifications required by the job and has mostly adopted a static approach to studying the consequences of perceived overqualification. However, two issues with previous research make our knowledge of perceived overqualification incomplete: (a) previous studies often conflate quasi-static qualifications required by the job with changeable qualifications utilized on the job and sometimes ignore the latter when conceptualizing and defining perceived overqualification, and (b) existing research mostly does not distinguish between formalized jobs and malleable work roles and overlooks the role of employees' work roles in shaping their changeable perceptions of overqualification. In addressing these two issues, this thesis challenges the dominant view on perceived overqualification by demonstrating it involves the comparison between employees' qualifications and qualifications utilized to perform work roles and adopts a role theory perspective to explore how both employees who feel overqualified and employers shape changeable perceived overqualification.

Specifically, this thesis first draws on role theory and proactive perspectives on work design to propose that perceived overqualification is malleable and employees who feel overqualified may take the initiative to enlarge their work roles, thus utilizing more qualifications at work and reducing subsequent perceived overqualification (Model 1). Second, this thesis draws on the job–role differentiation perspective to differentiate qualifications utilized on the job and perceived overqualification from qualifications required by the job and objective overqualification and proposes a role-based conceptualization of

perceived overqualification. Role-based perceived overqualification is defined as the extent to which the focal employee perceives he or she has surplus education, experience, knowledge, skills, abilities, and other qualifications relative to qualifications utilized at work. This thesis further proposes that employees who have high levels of perceived role breadth and enact broader work roles, irrespective of whether they are objectively overqualified, can utilize more qualifications at work and perceive less role-based overqualification, thus having higher affective commitment and lower turnover intentions (Model 2). Third, this thesis proposes that high-performance work systems (HPWS) and leader-member exchange (LMX) have positive effects on perceived role breadth, thus reducing role-based perceived overqualification and, in turn, leading to higher affective commitment and lower turnover intentions (Model 3).

This thesis conducted three studies to validate the measurements of role-based perceived overqualification and perceived role breadth and to test the theoretical models. The results from two field studies and an experiment provided support for the first and second theoretical models and partially supported the third theoretical model. This thesis found that HPWS and LMX were positively related to perceived role breadth and role-based perceived overqualification was positively related to turnover intentions. However, the negative effect of perceived role breadth on role-based perceived overqualification, the negative effect of role-based perceived overqualification on affective commitment, and the indirect effects of HPWS and LMX were not supported. Finally, the findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications of this thesis are discussed.

*Keywords:* perceived overqualification, objective overqualification, job-role differentiation perspective, role theory, perceived role breadth