Are We Friends? Relative Overqualification, Citizenship, and the Mediating Role of Friendship Network Centrality

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Abstract

Integrating overqualification research with the social network perspective, we examine how social networks represent a mechanism linking relative overqualification and supervisors' perceptions of employee organizational citizenship behaviors. Specifically, drawing upon social comparison and social exchange theories, we suggest that relative overqualification (ROQ) has implications for employees' centrality in a friendship network and that friendship network centrality mediates the relationship between ROQ and supervisors' perception of a focal employee's organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers (OCBI). Further, extending social comparison theory to the context of workgroup membership, we identify focal employees' perception of workgroup team orientation as a moderator determining the strength of the indirect relationship between ROQ and OCBI via friendship network centrality. Multilevel modeling using multi-source time-lagged data from 182 employees and 33 supervisors working in restaurants in the Southwestern United States showed a negative relationship between ROQ and friendship network centrality with friendship network centrality mediating the relationship between ROQ and OCBI. Moreover, the results of path analysis indicated that the indirect relationship between ROQ and OCBI via friendship network centrality was stronger for employees who perceived low levels of team orientation. Implications and directions for perceived overqualification and social network research are discussed.

Keywords: Relative overqualification (ROQ), friendship network centrality, team orientation, organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers (OCBI)

Are We Friends? Relative Overqualification, Citizenship, and the Mediating Role of Friendship Network Centrality

Perceived overqualification refers to the extent to which employees believe they possess qualifications that exceed those required by their jobs (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). It is regarded as an occupational mismatch whereby individuals possess surplus knowledge, education, skills, and/or experience when compared to the requirements of their job positions (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Johnson et al., 2002). Previous research has documented the prevalence of the overqualification phenomenon across the world. For example, it has been estimated that 22.4% of employees in the G20 countries were overqualified for their jobs in 2021 (International Labour Organization, 2023). As the portion of overqualified employees in the labor market is substantial, scholarly work investigating this phenomenon remains highly relevant. Today, there is a rich body of literature examining the relationship between perceptions of overqualification and outcomes such as job satisfaction, performance, and turnover (Harari et al., 2017).

Overqualified employees possess greater levels of *human capital* than the job requires (Sikora et al., 2016). More than a decade ago, Feldman and Maynard (2011) posed the question of whether overqualification would also be associated with higher levels of *social capital* (i.e., the resources that individuals gain due to their social network relationships: Coleman, 1988), and pointed to the possibility that possessing greater levels of human capital than required could

actually be instrumental in developing higher levels of social capital. In the following decade, a small number of studies investigated the nature of the relationship between perceived overqualification and coworker relationships. In their recent review of the overqualification literature, Erdogan and Bauer (2021) concluded that the existing small body of research is suggestive of a sense of alienation and distancing from coworkers, but also called for additional studies in this area. As a case in point, no studies to date examined whether and when feelings of overqualification serve as a barrier to developing strong interpersonal connections with one's coworkers such as friendships. Workplace friendships are important to develop in the workplace given their effects on employee flourishing, and positive emotions (Colbert et al., 2016). Whether and when feelings of overqualification serve as a barrier to developing strong interpersonal connections with one's coworkers such as friendships is an important research question. This is because researchers also contended that having a network of workplace friendships could alleviate some of the harmful effects of perceived overqualification (Howard et al., 2022), but it is currently unclear whether employees who feel overqualified are actually in a position to build strong friendship ties.

Further, the existing studies examining the interpersonal implications of overqualification (e.g., Deng et al., 2018; Erdogan et al., 2020) focused solely on employees' own overqualification levels. It is important to note that employees may feel overqualified in a workplace setting where feelings of overqualification are prevalent or rare. For example, an employee who feels overqualified in a workgroup where such perceptions are commonly held may have different experiences compared to an employee who is one of few employees who feel overqualified (Hu et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2023). To capture the joint influence of self and coworker overqualification, Jahantab et al. (2023) proposed and showed that relative

overqualification (ROQ: an individual overqualification relative to other group members' overqualification perceptions) had unique implications for employees' behavior such that, feeling more overqualified than one's coworkers had positive implications for employees' behaviors such as OCBs through heightened relative standing with their supervisor. Establishing the nomological network of relative overqualification remains an important research direction, and an exploration of how relative overqualification relates to friendship ties among coworkers is a natural extension of this earlier work.

In this study, we draw upon social comparison (Festinger, 1954) and social exchange (Blau, 1964) theories to predict that individuals who are relatively overqualified will have fewer friendship ties with their coworkers, which should, in turn, affect the degree to which they demonstrate citizenship behaviors targeting their coworkers, or OCBI. Social comparison theory suggests that relatively overqualified employees will act in ways that separate themselves from their coworkers. In turn, based on the social exchange theory, we predict that employees' position in friendship networks will affect their OCB directed at coworkers. Finally, drawing upon social comparison and social exchange theories, we suggest that a focal employee perceiving that the workgroup is characterized by high team orientation (workgroup's team orientation; the degree to which collaborative behavior is valued among workgroup members: Erdogan et al., 2006) will moderate the indirect effect of ROQ on OCBI via friendship network centrality. In developing their team-based social comparison model, Margolis and Dust (2019) suggest that team norms of competition versus collaboration determine one's tendency to assimilate or contrast with the referent's standards and that collaborative contexts lead to assimilative social comparisons such that "finding common ground and aligning incentives for collective accomplishment becomes their focus" (p.375). As such, instead of distancing

themselves from coworkers, relatively overqualified employees who perceive a high team

orientation are expected to assimilate with the workgroup, suggesting a moderating effect. Our

research model is depicted in Figure 1.

      This study makes three important contributions to overqualification and social network

literature. First, by introducing a social network perspective to overqualification research, this

study advances the literature in going beyond an individual, dyadic, or group-level investigation

of overqualification effects and in examining its relationship with employees' social networks.

Particularly, by investigating the role of social exchanges among organizational members, the

present study unpacks a social network mechanism through which ROQ translates to individual

outcomes of OCBI. In doing so, we also respond to calls made by scholars who have emphasized

the importance of incorporating social networks into studies of overqualification (e.g., Feldman

& Maynard, 2011; Russell et al., 2016).

      Second, building on Margolis and Dust's (2019) theorization of social comparison

processes in a group framework, we strive to answer the question of *when* ROQ affects

friendship network centrality. In so doing, we advance the literature by introducing a workgroup

attribute perceived by focal employees as a contingency variable to overqualification research

(Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Erdogan et al., 2011). Team orientation is an important moderator as it

directs the employees' tendency to focus on collective accomplishment. The present study adds

to the body of research adopting a contingency perspective to overqualification and thus,

presents a fine-grained assessment of overqualification effects (Erdogan et al., 2020).

      Finally, we seek to contribute to the social network literature by identifying an important

predictor of friendship network centrality. Indeed, while the extant literature has typically

examined the outcomes of social networks, the examination of antecedents of such networks has

been relatively overlooked (Erdogan et al., 2020; Zohar & Tenne-Gazit, 2008). This study underscores an important direction by investigating the mediating role of friendship network centrality in linking ROQ to OCBI. Hence, in addition to identifying a mechanism through which ROQ translates to outcomes, we introduce an important predictor of friendship centrality.

Theory and Hypotheses

Perceived Overqualification, Friendship Network Centrality, and OCBI

Network ties are connections between members of the organization. Organizational studies using network analysis have suggested that these connections can have a significant influence on information transfer (e.g., Coleman, 1988; Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993), organizational learning (e.g., Fisher & White, 2000), and the execution of organizational activities (e.g., Shah, 2000). In light of this, investigating the correlates of social network dynamics of organizations is critical.

Network centrality captures one's position in the social hierarchy of the collegial social networks that shape the informal organization at work. Organizations hire employees not only to perform a specific job but also with the hope that they become integrated into the social structure of the organization (Erdogan et al., 2020). Friendship networks are key parts of an employee's social capital and describe the ties of affection and camaraderie that link team members (Baldwin et al., 1997). Friendship networks in the workplace are particularly important because friendship provides access to private information, channels emotional support, strengthens commitment to work, serves as legitimating signals of identity, and increases performance (Brands & Mehra, 2019; Ibarra et al., 2005; Podolny & Baron, 1997). Friendship ties indicate the presence of a relationship that goes beyond occupying formal roles, and satisfy employees' socioemotional

goals (Song et al., 2020). Centrality in the friendship network is measured as the number of friendship links that an individual has in a system of social relations. Feeley and colleagues (2008) suggest that "Individuals are more likely to have a greater number of peer relationships than friendship networks in an organization" (p. 59). They further note that peer relationships over time can strengthen into friendships. As such, friendship networks are distinct from peer relationships. According to Ibarra (1993), friendship network ties are the number of employees who are good friends with the focal employee, and people whom they would see socially outside of work.

Friendship ties are more likely to emerge between individuals when relationship partners are warm and supportive and offer comfort and companionship to the other party (Klein et al. 2004). Drawing upon social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), we contend that employees' level of ROQ will have implications for their centrality in friendship networks. Social comparison theory postulates that individuals regularly scan their environment, seeking information to detect differences and similarities among multiple referents (if available) in order to form comparative judgments in reacting to their own circumstances (Festinger, 1954). Individuals' subjective assessments regarding their own standing relative to others, in turn, influence their attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors (Wood, 1989).

Research has shown that feelings of overqualification are associated with a sense of deprivation from the job the individual feels they should have held based on their qualifications (Erdogan et al., 2018), and anger at one's employment situation (Debus et al., 2023), which tends to result in withdrawal and distancing from one's current job (Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013). In a workgroup framework, where employees stand relative to coworkers should play a role in influencing the nature of the ties employees develop with coworkers. Employees who are

relatively overqualified are on the higher end of the overqualification distribution, and thus, are expected to feel more deprived than the rest of the team, which should affect how they relate to coworkers. Indirectly supporting this argument, Li and colleagues (2022) showed that employees were more likely to be both contemptuous and envious of their peers when they believed themselves as more highly qualified than their peers. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of relative overqualification – those who are on the lower end of the overqualification distribution, even if feeling overqualified, should not keep themselves apart from the team as they are feeling less deprived than the rest of the team and envious of their peers. This would remove a barrier to friendship ties. Relatively overqualified employees' behaviors to keep themselves distant from peers, on the other hand, may make relatively overqualified employees less attractive for coworkers to build friendship ties with.

> *Hypothesis 1: Relative overqualification (ROQ) is negatively related to an employee's*
> *centrality in a friendship network.*

Emphasizing the social exchanges that take place among employees, we draw upon social comparison theory to further propose that a focal employee's centrality in a friendship network is associated with the supervisor's perception of their organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers (OCBI) and that friendship network centrality mediates the relationships between ROQ and OCBI. OCBI refers to employees' discretionary efforts to aid other individuals in the workplace (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Helping peers with heavy workloads or mentoring new colleagues are examples of OCBI directed at coworkers. We focus our theorizing on organizational citizenship behaviors that benefit specific individuals in the organization (i.e., OCBI) as opposed to OCBs that benefit the organization in general (OCBO) for two reasons. First, OCBI is driven more by affect, while OCBO is driven more by cognition (Lee & Allen,

2002). This has important implications for the study of organizational citizenship behaviors through a friendship network lens because OCBI, like friendship relationships, is more likely to be an expression of employees' affect at work (Matta et al., 2015), and thereby more appropriate for the purpose of this study. Second, there should exist an appropriate match between the referents who have social ties with a focal employee and the referents whose treatment is reciprocated by that employee. Because these referents are individuals who form an employee's social circle (i.e., determine the employees' level of centrality in the friendship network), examining OCBI is more appropriate.

In the first part of our model, we hypothesized that ROQ is associated with friendship network centrality. Drawing upon social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), we further contend that employees with a high degree of friendship network centrality will likely engage in OCBI. According to social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964), "individuals pursue relationships in a self-interested fashion, seeking to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs of their social relationships" (Klein et al., 2004, p. 953). Individuals tend to return the socio-economic resources that they receive beyond transactional ones with an action of a similar value (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). Individuals expect reciprocity in high-quality relationships in order to protect and preserve these relationships (Kilduff & Brass, 2010). As individuals strive to retain, protect, and build resources (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals who maintain strong friendship ties with others will act in ways that will help preserve those ties.

Previous research also indicates that friendship networks affect the amount of social influence employees have (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993). Friendship ties tend to be strong and intimate, connecting people who are similar on a variety of personal characteristics (Marsden, 1988), and involving more frequent interaction (Krackhardt, 1990; Krackhardt & Porter, 1986;

Krackhardt & Stern, 1988). One way to reciprocate this positive treatment is by providing

coworkers with help and support. Accordingly, employees who are central in a friendship

network will return the favor that they receive from their coworkers by providing them with

OCBI. In other words, employees who are central in friendship networks likely feel obligated to

return the favor and trust of coworkers who have established friendship links with them and thus

reciprocate colleagues' positive treatment by helping or supporting them (Cropanzano &

Mitchell, 2005). As such, we predict that friendship network centrality is positively related to

OCBI. This prediction is consistent with those of numerous studies which have demonstrated the

implications of social networks for employee behavioral outcomes (e.g., Bowler & Brass, 2006;

Venkataramani et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2009).

> *Hypothesis 2: Friendship network centrality is positively related to an employee's*
>
> *organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers (OCBI).*

Taken together, this line of reasoning suggests that ROQ indirectly affects OCBI through

friendship network centrality. Specifically, ROQ influences an employee's centrality in a

friendship network which in turn affects the employee's OCBI, suggesting a mediated

relationship where friendship network centrality transmits the effect of ROQ on OCBI. In other

words, we suggest that employees who are relatively overqualified act in ways that separate them

from coworkers reducing relatively overqualified employees' centrality in friendship networks,

that in turn decreases their engagement in OCBI as there exists a lesser inclination to reciprocate

in the social exchange relationships between them and relatively overqualified employees.

> *Hypothesis 3: Friendship network centrality mediates the relationship between employee*
>
> *relative overqualification (ROQ) and the supervisor's perception of employee*
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> *organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers (OCBI).*

The Moderating Role of Focal Employee's Perception of Workgroup Team Orientation

Finally, we examine whether and how a focal employee's perception of the workgroup's team orientation influences social comparison processes in a group framework and affects the strength of the relationship between ROQ and OCBI. In offering a social comparison theory framework in groups, Margolis and Dust (2019) predicted that group norms regarding competition or collaboration affect team members' likelihood of engaging in assimilation or contrast. Specifically, they suggest that under a competitive orientation, individuals contrast themselves and their referents to compare their strengths and weaknesses with the target to construct a success strategy, while in a collaborative context, they assimilate with their referents such that finding common ground and aligning incentives for collective accomplishment becomes their focus (Deutsch, 1949; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). As such, examining the role of perceived team orientation on the relationship between ROQ and OCBI remains relevant and important.

We build on Margolis and Dust's (2019) notion and incorporate a focal employee's perception of the workgroup's team orientation into our model and suggest that perceived team orientation (i.e., the degree to which collaborative behavior is valued among workgroup members: Erdogan et al., 2006) will moderate the indirect ROQ-OCBI relationship via friendship network centrality. Specifically, we expect that individual perception of team orientation buffers the negative indirect impact of ROQ on supervisors' perception of employee OCBI.

Team-oriented workgroups foster interdependence among members, emphasize getting along with others and developing friendships, and value cooperative behaviors. When the focal employee perceives that the workgroup is characterized by strong cooperation and collaboration and norms promote cooperative behaviors (Eby & Dobbins, 1997), or when the perceived team

orientation is high, there will be more interactions and interdependence among employees that

trigger establishing favorable ties and compensate for the negative social comparisons that

employees make about their peers. When relatively overqualified employees perceive a higher

level of team orientation, the negative effects of ROQ on friendship ties should be less

pronounced. In contrast, the harmful effects of ROQ on friendship ties should be more

pronounced when the team is perceived to be low in team orientation, as the group context will

not be in a position to counteract the distancing effects of ROQ on team members' friendships.

> *Hypothesis 4: A focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation moderates*
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> *the negative relationship between ROQ and friendship network centrality, such that this*
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> *relationship is less negative when perceived team orientation is higher.*

Moderated Mediation Effect

Given the notion that a focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation

buffers the negative effect of ROQ on friendship network centrality (Hypothesis 4) and that

friendship network centrality mediates the relationship between ROQ and OCBI (Hypothesis 3),

we expect a concomitant effect demonstrating a pattern of moderated mediation relationship.

Specifically, we propose that while friendship network centrality transmits the effect of ROQ on

OCBI, this relationship weakens as the focal employee perception of workgroup team orientation

increases.

> *Hypothesis 5: A focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation moderates*
>
> *the indirect relationship between ROQ and OCBI via friendship network centrality, such*
>
> *that this relationship is less negative when perceived team orientation is higher.*

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Method

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Sample, Participants, and Procedure

Data were collected from 39 restaurants located in the Southwestern US[1]. This industry provides an appropriate setting for the purpose of this study due to multiple reasons. First, because working in a restaurant requires relatively less specialized knowledge and skills, we expected to encounter varying levels of overqualification in this setting, and therefore it is well-suited to examining the effects of overqualification. Second, it is common for employees working in a restaurant to engage in social interactions including communication and information exchange. Thus, restaurants provide appropriate settings to examine the dynamics of social networks. Finally, it is likely that enough variance exists in terms of team orientation across restaurants because several tasks engaging different workers might be performed before a service is delivered.

We contacted the restaurant managers to ask whether they were willing to participate in the study. Upon receiving approval from the managers, our research team visited restaurants to administer paper-pencil surveys during business hours. To minimize the likelihood of common-source bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we gathered data from three different sources: employees, coworkers, and supervisors, at three points in time. Employees filled out surveys at Time 1 and Time 2 whereas managers' surveys were administered at Time 3. Specifically, the employee surveys facilitated obtaining employees' perceptions of their overqualification as well as their perceptions of the workgroup's team orientation at Time 1. Relative overqualification scores were then derived from perceived overqualification rates. In Time 2, each employee reported their friendship ties with their coworkers. For each focal employee, we used coworker reported friendship ties at Time 2 (two weeks later) and accordingly, employees' centrality in their

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[1] Even though the study setting is similar to the one used by Jahantab et al. (2023), the current study reports a different data collection. The study reported here is based on data collected five years after the one used in Jahantab et al. (2023).

friendship network was calculated (Freeman 1978/1979). Finally, the supervisor surveys were

designed to facilitate obtaining behavioral ratings of all employees in the corresponding

workgroup at Time 3 (one month later). All employees and their supervisors were asked to

participate under the assurance of confidentiality. Removing cases with missing data, thirty-four

supervisors and 189 employees embedded in 34 workgroups participated in the study. We

administered surveys in both English and Spanish due to the large number of native Spanish

speakers in the sample and applied translation-back translation procedures for the surveys in

Spanish as suggested by Brislin (1980).

One group was excluded from the analysis because the within-group response rate fell

short of the 60% cutoff suggested by Timmerman (2005), reducing the final usable sample to

182 employees (response rate = 83%) and 33 supervisors (response rate = 85%) nested in 33

groups. The average within-group response rate was 90%. Workgroups consisted of 3 to 16

employees, and the average group size was 5.52 (SD = 2.82). The average employee age was

26.12 years (SD = 9.52), and the average supervisor age was 29.94 years (SD = 7.76). The

majority of the employees were women (58.8%), whereas 66.4% of the supervisors were men.

More than half of the employees (55.5%) had some college education (graduated or student),

whereas most supervisors had a college education (90.7%). The average employee organizational

tenure was 1.71 years (SD = 2.03), and the average supervisor organizational tenure was 3.80

years (SD = 3.19).

Measures

Unless otherwise stated, responses to survey questions were measured on 5-point Likert-

type scales ranging from *1 = strongly disagree* to *5 = strongly agree*. Whenever necessary, we

changed the reference in the items to make them applicable to our research setting (i.e., we

substituted 'this organization' with 'this restaurant'). For each measure, we averaged the scores

of all included items to create a composite score, such that higher scores indicated higher values

for the underlying constructs. Full measures are available in the online supplements.

Relative overqualification (ROQ)

Following Jahantab et al. (2023), we calculated ROQ by subtracting the group mean of

overqualification from the focal employee's perceived overqualification score. Employees rated

their overqualification perception through a nine-item scale developed and validated by Maynard

et al. (2006). A sample item was "I have more education than what my job requires" ($\alpha = .81$).

Friendship network centrality (FRDNC)

Coworkers determined the degree of a focal employee's centrality in a friendship

network. Using standard network techniques (e.g., Burt, 1992), participants were given a list of

coworkers' names and asked to mark the name of coworkers in the restaurant with whom they

are friends (i.e., "Mark the name of coworkers with whom you socialize outside of work": Ibarra,

1993). Then, the number of friendship links was divided by the maximum number of possible

ties that the focal employee could have. In other words, if n were the number of network players,

we would standardize in-degree centrality by dividing the number of friendship links by ($n - 1$).

This would standardize the scores of in-degree centrality of employees from different groups so

that they could be meaningfully compared. Because each coworker needed to consider a

relatively large number of focal employees when responding to the network item, a single item

(e.g., Lau & Liden, 2008) was appropriate to measure network ties (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005).

Team orientation perception (TORI)

Employees reported their individual perceptions of workgroup team orientation through a

three-item scale adapted from the Organizational Culture Profile developed and validated by

O'Reilly et al. (1991). A sample item was "The work culture in this restaurant is collaborative"

($\alpha = .87$).

Organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers (OCBI)

Supervisors reported each employee's OCBI using the seven-item scale developed and

validated by Williams and Anderson (1991). A sample item was "This employee helps others

who have heavy workloads" ($\alpha = .90$).

Control variables

Meta-analytic findings suggest that employee attributes of age, education, and tenure

matter to their organizational citizenship behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2008; 2009; 2010). Also,

several empirical studies on citizenship behaviors have found sex to be significant in their

analyses (e.g., Morrison, 1994; Van Dyne & Ang, 1998). As such, we considered employee age,

sex, education, and tenure as potential control variables. Because workgroups varied in size

which can affect team processes (Li et al., 2015), we also considered workgroup size as a

control. Our approach was also consistent with the previous research that controlled for group

size in studying the effects of employees' positions relative to coworkers (e.g., Vidyarthi et al.,

2016). Finally, the group mean of overqualification (labeled as GOQ) was a relevant control in

order to be able to examine the within- and between-group effects of overqualification.

As shown in Table 1, age, sex, and education were not correlated with either friendship

centrality or OCBI. Following Spector (2021), we entered these into our model one by one, but

their inclusion did not result in any changes in the results reported in the paper, and therefore we

excluded them from our model. The inclusion of organizational tenure, group mean

overqualification, and group size resulted in significant coefficients for these controls, and

therefore we retained them in our model. Note that removing these controls does not result in

changes in the significance and direction of the results reported.

Analyses

Because employees were nested in workgroups and supervisors rated OCBIs of

individual members, we used multilevel path analysis with the maximum likelihood estimator

with robust standard errors in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to test our main and moderation

effects. We grand mean-centered the predictors and created the interaction term by multiplying

the centered predictor variables included in the model as an observed predictor. To test the

mediation (Hypothesis 3) and moderated mediation (Hypothesis 5) hypotheses, we used the

Monte Carlo resampling method to estimate 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs). The use of such

CIs is superior to traditional methods in examining conditional indirect relationships because it

ameliorates power problems introduced by non-normal sampling distributions of an indirect

effect (Preacher et al., 2010).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations among the

study variables. We calculated the intraclass correlation coefficient, ICC(1) to examine the extent

of between-group variation in employees' OCBI. The value of $ICC(1) = .26$, $\chi^2 (32) = 93.22$, $p <$

.001 suggested that there was significant between-group variation in the outcome variable, and

further justified that multilevel analyses were appropriate for hypothesis testing (Bliese, 2000).

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess the psychometric properties of study measures with multiple items: POQ, TORI, and OCBI. Each item was constrained to fall under a single factor, and the factors were allowed to correlate. The three-factor model showed acceptable fit statistics (χ^2 (149) = 281.26, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .94, IFI = .91). To make comparisons, we ran alternate models with fewer factors. The CFA results showed that the hypothesized three-factor model had a superior fit with the data compared to the two-factor models where POQ and TORI were combined ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 243.08, $p < .001$), where POQ and OCBI were combined ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 266.52, $p < .001$), and where TORI and OCBI were combined ($\Delta\chi^2$ (2) = 244.07, $p < .001$). Likewise, the hypothesized three-factor model demonstrated a superior fit over the one-factor model where POQ, TORI, and OCBI were combined ($\Delta\chi^2$ (3) = 510.06, $p < .001$).

Results of multilevel path modeling showed that after controlling for the effect of employee tenure, group size, and group mean of overqualification, ROQ was negatively and significantly related to employees' centrality in friendship networks ($\gamma = -0.20$, $p = .035$), providing support for Hypothesis 1 (see Table 2). Results also showed that friendship network centrality was positively related to employee OCBI ($\gamma = 0.25$, $p = .022$), supporting Hypothesis 2 (see Table 2). In testing Hypothesis 3, results showed that after statistically controlling for the effect of organizational tenure and the group level controls, friendship network centrality significantly mediated the effect of ROQ on OCBI (-0.12, bias-corrected 95% CI [-0.20, -0.05]), supporting Hypothesis 3.

In testing Hypothesis 4, results revealed that a focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation significantly moderated the relationship between ROQ and friendship network centrality ($\gamma = 0.23$, $p < .001$), providing support for Hypothesis 4. Simple slope analysis (Aiken

& West, 1991) with one standard deviation above and below the mean indicated that the nature

of the interaction effect was consistent with our expectation (see Figure 2), such that when

perceived team orientation was low, ROQ was negatively related to friendship network centrality

($\gamma = -0.39$, $t = -7.37$, $p < .001$), whereas when perceived team orientation was high, the ROQ-

friendship network centrality relationship was non-significant ($\gamma = 0.01$, $t = 0.76$, $p = .704$).

In testing the moderated mediation model proposed in Hypothesis 5, results of the Monte

Carlo resampling method based on 5,000 resamples revealed that the indirect ROQ-OCBI link

via friendship network centrality was negative and significant when perceived team orientation

was low (-.15, bias-corrected 95% CI [-.25, -.05]), whereas non-significant when perceived team

orientation was high (-.05, bias-corrected 95% CI [-.14, .04]), supporting Hypothesis 5 (see

Table 3). The moderated mediation index was also significant (.05, bias-corrected 95% CI [.01,

.11]), suggesting a pattern of moderated mediation where perceived team orientation moderated

the indirect relationship between ROQ and OCBI via friendship network centrality.

Supplementary Analysis

In order to examine whether ROQ's effects on outcomes would still hold with the inclusion

of POQ in the model, we considered POQ as a potential control variable. We were unable to

include POQ and ROQ in the same model because ROQ is the POQ group mean centered (ROQ

is POQ minus group mean value) and they were therefore highly correlated (i.e., $r = .88$). As

such, the inclusion of POQ and ROQ in the same model resulted in model convergence

problems. However, POQ and ROQ are conceptually distinct, and they were not interchangeable

in these models. When we substituted POQ for ROQ in the model, we found a negative main

effect of POQ on friendship network centrality, but no interaction effect between POQ and team

orientation perception in predicting outcomes (see Table 4). In contrast, ROQ offered greater

support for the hypothesized model.

Discussion

More than a decade ago, Feldman and Maynard (2011) asked how the possession of

greater levels of human capital affects the social capital of overqualified employees. However,

since then only a handful of studies have investigated the nature of the relationship between

perceived overqualification and coworker relationships, with inconclusive results. We advance

overqualification theory by moving beyond the isolated dyadic or group-level examination of

overqualification effects to the investigation of the dynamics of social networks among

overqualified employees and their workgroup peers. Overqualification literature has largely

overlooked the notion of overqualification as a component of employees' human capital

affecting their social capital which in turn affects organizational outcomes. We build on previous

work (e.g., Erdogan et al., 2020) to account for the social comparison effect among workgroup

members to model the relative overqualification effect on employees' friendship network

centrality and citizenship behavior towards coworkers. We also contextualized our model by

theorizing how employees' perceptions of workgroup team orientation affect the nature of main

relationships. In so doing, we responded to Carpenter and colleagues' (2012) call to advance

social network research in the organizational context by answering the question of *when* social

capital is related to its antecedents and consequences.

We theorized that workplace social interaction – including social comparison within the

workgroup and social exchange relationships with coworkers – plays an important role in how

overqualification affects organizational outcomes. Particularly, we theorized that overqualified

employees do not assess their qualifications in a vacuum; instead, this evaluation occurs in the

backdrop of coworkers' overqualification. Thus, we echo Jahantab et al.'s (2023) view that "evaluations of overqualification occur in the social setting provided by the workgroups, wherein comparisons with coworkers are commonplace, making it critical to focus on employees' overqualification relative to workgroup members' overqualification" (p. 875). Further, our findings demonstrated that ROQ has implications for the centrality of an employee in the workgroup friendship network. In particular, we found that relatively overqualified employees act in ways that separate them from their coworkers, and such behaviors make them less attractive to peers as someone to build a friendship with. Thus, consistent with our theory, we found a negative implication of human capital for the employee social capital – a discovery that has implications for both theory development and organizational practice.

Next, we drew on tenets of social exchange theory to show that centrality in friendship networks is positively related to citizenship behavior towards coworkers and this centrality mediates the relationship between ROQ and OCBI. We found that the simultaneous consideration of the frameworks of social comparison and social exchange theories offers a more encompassing model of social interactions among organizational members, especially as it pertains to overqualification. We note that despite considerable work in social network literature, it is novel to identify relative qualification as an important predictor of friendship network centrality. This investigation of the dynamics of friendship networks is important because information obtained from friendship links is relevant to and influential on important organizational outcomes (Brass, 1992). Finally, we strived to identify a condition that alters the effect of ROQ on friendship network centrality and supervisors' perception of employee OCBI. Our finding that employees' perception of workgroup team orientation moderates the ROQ-centrality in friendship network-OCBI relationship suggests that employees' perceptions of

workgroup characteristics as a boundary condition determine the strength and effect of social

network ties among organizational actors (Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Gully et al., 1995). In

doing so, the present study also adds to the body of research adopting a contingency approach to

overqualification research.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

A significant strength of this study was extending the overqualification literature beyond

the traditional individual-level focus to a social network focus. Rather than merely adding

another outcome variable to the array of already found individual-level outcomes, we integrated

overqualification research with social network research as these two streams of research are rich

in themselves but have remained exclusive and distinct. Contextualizing overqualification to the

dynamics of workgroup membership and thus examining the effect of ROQ – instead of

perceived overqualification – was another strength of this study. Yet, another strength emanates

from our time-lagged multi-source study design. This method minimized the likelihood of

common-source bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, controlling for the effect of theoretically

driven exogenous variables, the adoption of advanced multilevel path analyses and a

supplementary analysis facilitated a rigorous test of the hypothesized relationships.

Despite its strengths and important contributions, this study is not without limitations.

First, one important limitation of this study concerns the direction of causality. Even though we

developed theory-based arguments to establish the direction of the relationships and collected

time-lagged data, the possibility of alternative causal directions remains. For instance, while we

proposed that friendship network centrality is a predictor of OCBI, the reverse is also possible.

Future studies applying longitudinal or experimental research designs are warranted to establish

causality and rule out the possibility of reverse causality among the variables of interest.

Additionally, while we minimized the common-source bias by collecting data from different

sources (Podsakoff et al., 2003), future research may use objective measures or experimental

design to operationalize some variables of interest in order to minimize the common-method bias

– a potential limitation of our measurement. Furthermore, we used only one exemplar of the

workgroup attributes as a moderator, but it is entirely possible that other factors such as

employee personality, team potency, and collectivism alter the main relationships. Finally, we

collected OCBI from the supervisors. Although it is a common practice in the literature to

measure OCB from supervisors (e.g., Donia et al., 2016; Thompson et al., 2020), we admit that

collecting OCBI data from coworkers would have strengthened our ability to draw inferences.

This is because we argued that friendship network centrality relates to OCBI directed at the

coworker and hence, coworkers should be the most knowledgeable of this information.

Future research is recommended to not only overcome the limitations of the current study

but also advance this stream of research in potentially fruitful directions. First, overqualification

researchers should investigate overqualification dynamics at the group level (e.g., Sierra, 2011)

in future studies. One such question worthy of investigation is how workgroups fare in group-

level outcomes such as team performance or team potency when the average magnitude and/or

nature of distribution in individual overqualification differ across workgroups. Recently, research

has started examining the effects of membership in multiple teams (Mistry et al., 2022; van de

Brake & Berger, 2021). Our investigation focused on a setting where each member belonged to a

single team, but we speculate that multiple team memberships may introduce the possibility of

the effects of relative overqualification in one team being contingent on the relative overqualification in the other – a question worth examining in future studies.

Future research is needed to establish the generalizability of our findings by replicating the findings in different employee samples and workgroup contexts. For example, future research can assess whether these results hold in other industries (e.g., IT industry or academia), economic conditions (e.g., high unemployment), and cultural contexts (e.g., a collectivistic country like Japan) because each of these factors independently as well as jointly has the potential to affect the relationships examined in this study. We also suggest future research to investigate how relatively overqualified employees respond to their appraisal of ROQ: (a) if they view their overqualification positively or negatively, and (b) if their overqualification is volitional, i.e., based on their choice or not. We suspect that employees' reactions to their ROQ will likely differ when they chose to be overqualified versus when they had to take positions for which they are overqualified and when they view their overqualification positively than negatively. Finally, there might exist pertinent individual differences that affect when and how overqualification results in various organizational outcomes. For instance, some employees may have a lower need for challenge or recognition or less opportunity for mobility, or perhaps enjoy being a 'big fish'. Therefore, we recommend future research to examine the role of individual differences in overqualification-outcome relationships.

Practical Implications

This study has important implications for managing employees. In contemporary organizations, employee performance can also be assessed through organizational citizenship behaviors (Chiaburu et al., 2017). The findings of this study suggest that relatively overqualified employees, especially when they perceive that the workgroup is low on team orientation, engage

in less OCBI as their centrality in the friendship network decreases. Leaders, therefore, must note that employees evaluate their standing relative to others and that this relative evaluation affects employees' position in a friendship network, which in turn shapes the citizenship potential of these employees. Leaders must pay close attention to these social comparisons that employees engage in so that employee citizenship behaviors can be optimized. In other words, leaders should be aware of the innate desire of humans to compare themselves with relevant others since these social comparisons are inevitable and may have serious consequences for both employees and organizations. Moreover, managers may promote a group climate that advances friendship that goes beyond work relationships alone. For example, leaders can promote informal gatherings and socializing sessions among employees. Leaders can also emphasize higher-level similarities in workgroup members that override individual differences and dissimilarities. Organizational practitioners should note that the focal employees' perceptions of workgroup team orientation influence the probability of relatively overqualified employees emerging as central in a friendship network. This has important implications for managers in a diverse workforce as they need to recognize employees' beliefs and customize their leadership style such that perceptions of team orientation are promoted. For instance, managers can use effective communication, maintain equality in teams, reward teamwork, foster collaboration, and demonstrate team loyalty to achieve this goal. We note that because employee perceptions may not necessarily reflect the objective reality, leaders may be able to motivate subordinates by making them believe that their workgroup is high in team orientation.

Employee feeling of overqualification is often inevitable as overqualification is common in the workplace and social comparison is innate to human nature. Although some beneficial consequences of overqualification (e.g., higher job performance: Erdogan & Bauer, 2009) has

been evidenced, overqualification is still a barrier to job satisfaction and employee intentions to

stay (for a meta-analytic review, see Harari et al., 2017). As such, organizations should balance

their desire for hiring overqualified employees because of the positive and negative

consequences that it may bring. The results of this study suggest that relative overqualification

can interact with employee team orientation perception to influence OCBI although individual

perceived overqualification will not. The implication is that managers and employees should

attend to the feeling of relative overqualification (i.e., ROQ) distinctly from individual

overqualification (i.e., POQ).

Conclusion

Over four decades of overqualification research suggests that overqualification is related to

individual and organizational outcomes (Harari et al., 2017). However, whether overqualification

as a form of human capital would affect levels of social capital is relatively unexplored. This

study advances overqualification theory by moving beyond individual, dyadic, or group-level

examination to social network implications of overqualification effects. We drew upon social

comparison and social exchange theories to investigate the dynamics of social networks among

organizational players and their implication on citizenship behavior while also accounting for the

perception of workgroup social context. We showed a negative relationship between relative

overqualification and friendship network centrality with friendship network centrality mediating

the relationship between relative overqualification and employee OCBI, and these relationships

are affected by employees' perceptions of team orientation. Supported by study results, we assert

that viewing overqualification in isolation may represent an imperfect picture, and accounting for

workgroup social network and context is imperative in theorizing and managerial practices

concerning overqualification.

Declarations

Funding and/or Conflicts of Interests/Competing Interests

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	26.12	9.52									
2. Sex	.59	.49	.04								
3. Education	2.13	1.00	.13	-.04							
4. Organizational tenure	1.71	2.03	.29**	-.01	-.14						
5. Perceived overqualification	3.66	0.80	-.02	.02	-.04	-.06	(.81)				
6. Relative overqualification	0.00	0.70	.13	-.01	.04	-.01	.88**				
7. Friendship network centrality	0.24	0.27	-.05	-.02	.03	.12	-.29**	-.16*			
8. Team orientation perception	3.98	0.87	-.07	-.03	-.12	-.03	.06	.01	.03	(.87)	
9. OCBI	3.70	1.02	.05	.13	.03	.17*	-.04	-.06	.17*	.04	(.90)
Group level variable											
1. Group size	5.52	2.82									
2. Group overqualification	3.65	0.45	.18								

Notes. Individual level $n = 182$; group level $n = 33$; Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are reported along the diagonal. OCBI =

organizational citizenship behaviors directed at coworkers; Age and organizational tenure were in years. Sex was coded as 0 = Men, 1

= Women. Education was coded as 1 = non-college education, 2 = college student, 3 = college degree, 4 = graduate. * $p < .05$.   ** p

< .01 (two-tailed tests).

Table 2

Results of Path Analyses

	Friendship network centrality		OCBI	
	Est.	*SE*	Est.	*SE*
ROQ	-.20*	.09	-.09	.09
TORI	-.08	.06		
ROQ*TORI	.23**	.05		
Organizational tenure	.09	.03	.10**	.03
Group size	-.30**	.10	-.06	.05
GOQ	-.33**	.10	-.08	.08
Friendship network centrality			.25*	.09
Residual variance	.45**	.10		

Note. Individual level $N = 182$; group level $N = 33$; ROQ is relative overqualification; TORI is focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation; GOQ is group overqualification mean; Est. represents the unstandardized estimate; *SE* represents Standard Error. * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

Table 3

Moderated Mediation Results across Levels of Employee's Perception of Workgroup Team

Orientation (TORI)

Variable	Level	Conditional indirect effect	*Lower 2.5%*	*Upper 2.5%*
ROQ → FRDNC → OCBI	low TORI	-.15	-.25	-.05
	high TORI	-.05	-.14	.04
	difference	.05	.01	.11

Note. Individual level $N = 182$; group level $N = 33$; ROQ is relative overqualification; FRDNC is

friendship network centrality; OCBI is organizational citizenship behaviors directed at

coworkers; TORI is focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation.

Table 4

Results of Path Analyses (Supplementary Analysis)

	Friendship network centrality		OCBI	
	Est.	*SE*	Est.	*SE*
POQ	-.24**	.08	-.04	.08
TORI	-.04	.08		
POQ*TORI	.08	.08		
Organizational tenure	.09	.08	.22**	.08
Group size	-.34*	.16	.22	.23
GOQ	-.48**	.14	.02	.20
Friendship network centrality			.16*	.08
Residual variance	.39*	.15		

Note. Individual level $N = 182$; group level $N = 33$; POQ is perceived overqualification; TORI is focal employee's perception of workgroup team orientation; GOQ is group overqualification mean; Est. represents the unstandardized estimate; *SE* represents Standard Error. * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

Figure 1

Research Model

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Team orientation   │
                    │   perception (T1,   │
                    │  employee rated)    │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                               │
                               │ +
                               ▼
┌──────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────┐
│     Relative     │   │     Friendship      │   │   Organizational    │
│ overqualification│ − │ network centrality  │ + │     citizenship     │
│   (ROQ) (T1,     │──▶│    (T2, coworker    │──▶│  behaviors (OCBI)   │
│  employee rated) │   │       rated)        │   │ (T3, manager rated) │
└──────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────┘
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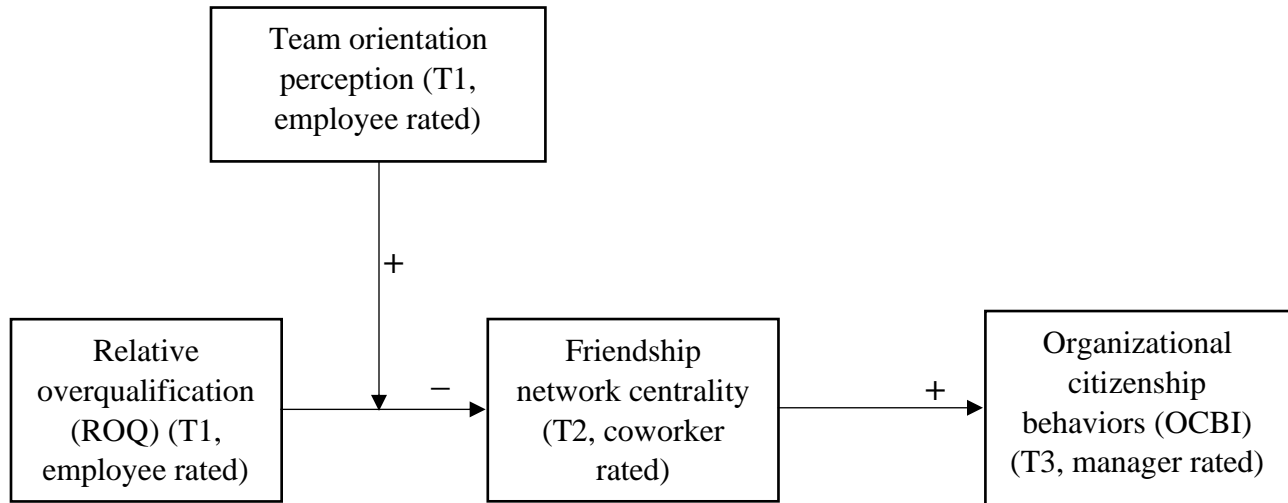
Figure 2

Focal Employee's Perceived Team Orientation as a Moderator of the Relationship between

Relative Overqualification and Friendship Network Centrality