

The Mediating Role of Trust In Coworker In The Effect Of Perceived Overqualification On Job Passion: A Study On Aircraft Maintenance Technicians

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Abstract

This study examines how perceived overqualification defined as employees' perception that their qualifications exceed job requirements affects job passion. Grounded in Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, which suggests that individuals seek a balance between belonging to a group and maintaining personal uniqueness, the study investigates two forms of job passion: harmonious passion (a balanced, self-directed engagement with work) and obsessive passion (a rigid, uncontrollable attachment to one's job). Additionally, the study explores the mediating role of trust in coworkers in the relationship between perceived overqualification and job passion. Data were collected from 227 aircraft maintenance technicians working in the Turkish aviation sector. Analyses were conducted using confirmatory factor analysis, multiple regression, and mediation analysis through SPSS 25.0 and Jamovi software. The results indicate that the misfit dimension of overqualification negatively predicts obsessive passion, while the simplicity dimension has a detrimental effect on harmonious passion. Moreover, trust in coworkers partially mediates both relationships. These findings offer theoretical contributions to understanding the emotional consequences of overqualification and provide actionable insights for HR practices in aviation and similar high-skill sectors.

1. Introduction

The evolving global economic and social dynamics have led to an increasing misfit between employees' qualifications and the positions in which they are employed. This growing disparity has prompted employees to develop the perception that their jobs do not fully utilize their capabilities and that their knowledge, skills, and experience exceed the requirements of their current roles. This perception, commonly referred to in the literature as perceived overqualification, is primarily shaped by subjective evaluations and social comparisons (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Johnson, Morrow & Johnson, 2002). When individuals perceive their work as intellectually or professionally inadequate, or when they feel overqualified compared to their coworkers, the sense of overqualification becomes more pronounced.

Perceived overqualification has been identified as a significant factor influencing employees' psychological attitudes in organizational contexts, such as job satisfaction and job passion (Harari, Manapragada & Viswesvaran, 2017; Tomás et al., 2023). However, the literature has yet to reach a clear consensus on the direction of this relationship. While some studies indicate that overqualification leads to negative work outcomes, others suggest that individuals may transform their perceived uniqueness into a source of positive motivation

(Erdogan, 2011). These contradictions imply that the effects of perceived overqualification may be shaped by contextual factors such as the employee's social environment. In particular, the nature of interpersonal relationships with coworkers and the level of trust within these relationships emerges as a critical determinant of the work experience.

In this regard, job passion is defined as a strong psychological connection, enthusiasm, and dedication that an individual feels toward their job (Vallerand et al., 2003). The formation of such passion is influenced not only by individual motivation but also by the social relationships and trust-based environment within the organization. When individuals feel accepted within the organization, their sense of belonging can be reinforced, and they may be better able to reframe their differences constructively. At this point, trust in coworker may increase one's sense of group belonging and help mitigate potential negative outcomes or, in some cases, make one's distinctiveness more visible, thereby weakening the sense of inclusion.

This research examines the effect of perceived overqualification on job passion and investigates the mediating role of trust in coworker within the framework of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT). According to ODT, individuals strive to balance two fundamental needs in their social lives: the need for belonging and the need for

distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). When an individual perceives themselves as overqualified, this balance may be disrupted, enhancing the need for differentiation. In such cases, trust-based relationships with coworkers may help to neutralize the negative effects of this perceived difference or, conversely, may amplify the visibility of one's distinctiveness, thus reducing the sense of belonging. Within this framework, the study presents conceptual explanations of the variables based on existing literature, followed by the methodology and findings.

2. Conceptual framework

This section provides information about the concepts forming the research model and explains the research hypotheses.

2.1. Perceived Overqualification

The concept of qualification can be defined as an individual's possession of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform a specific job or task. Fine and Cronshaw (1999) described qualification as a structure that reflects an individual's professional competence and encompasses their technical skills, problem-solving abilities, communication skills, and personal attributes in the workplace. This approach, which points to the alignment between the individual and the job, necessitates an evaluation of the extent to which the individual's knowledge and skills match the demands of the current job. In this context, Kulkarni et al. (2015, p. 544) stated that since employees may have different levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities, their level of qualification may also vary. They classified qualification levels as underqualified, adequately qualified, and overqualified. Accordingly, underqualified employees fall below the required competencies of the job, while adequately qualified employees fully meet the job requirements. Overqualification, on the other hand, refers to the perception that one possesses higher levels of knowledge, skills, and experience than what is required for the current job. However, the literature emphasizes that overqualification can be assessed based on both objective data and personal perceptions (Johnson, Morrow, & Johnson, 2002, p. 427). Objective evaluation involves comparing an individual's qualifications with job requirements based on standardized criteria, while subjective evaluation is based on the individual's perception of their own competence. For example, if a university graduate works in a position that only requires a high school diploma, this individual is objectively overqualified. If the same person believes that their skills exceed the job requirements, they may perceive themselves as subjectively overqualified. However, since it is not always possible to determine the exact knowledge and skills a job requires (Acaray, 2019, p. 448), subjective evaluations are frequently used, particularly in explaining employee attitudes and behaviors.

Subjective evaluation should not be considered merely a narrow perspective in which employees compare their current job with their qualifications. Employees can also evaluate their current job by comparing it with their expectations and what they hope to gain from it. Indeed, educated individuals with a wide range of knowledge and skills tend to have high expectations regarding their job status (Yu, Yang, Wang, Sun, & Hu, 2019, p. 6068). When such individuals compare their current job situation with the position they desire and believe they deserve, and find that their job roles do not meet their

expectations, this discrepancy may lead them to feel deprived. This feeling can become even more pronounced if the individual perceives that their coworkers are not at the same level of competence. In other words, the gap between objective working conditions and subjective expectations may lead to a perception of overqualification, which in turn can make employees feel deprived (Yu, Yang, Wang, Sun, & Hu, 2019, p. 6069). In this sense, perceived overqualification can also arise through social comparisons among employees. In this framework, Johnson and Johnson (2000, p. 167) state that the perception of overqualification stems from two main reasons: (1) the employee's belief that there are limited opportunities for development, and (2) misfit dimension between the person and the job. Especially in low-meaning, routine, and repetitive jobs, the individual may feel mentally or professionally understimulated and perceive their job as significantly beneath their capabilities. This may reinforce the feeling of "doing a job beneath my abilities," thus strengthening the perception of overqualification.

In light of these explanations, it can be said that perceived overqualification is a powerful psychological perception that may shape an individual's approach to their job. Particularly in work environments defined by strict rules and high levels of regulation, the formation of this perception may become a determining factor in how psychologically engaged employees are with their work.

2.2. Job Passion

This is a concept that refers to employees' levels of dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment to their work. It represents a psychological state in which employees direct their time, mental capacity, intelligence, energy, excitement, emotions, and concentration toward their work roles (Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis, & Sarigiannidis, 2023, p. 725). Therefore, it is closely related to employees' interest in and motivation for their work (Nursanti & Lestari, 2024, p. 1224). Employees with high levels of job passion are fully devoted to their tasks in terms of ideas and energy, which can result in increased enthusiasm and productivity (Pangestu, Wiradendi-Wolor, & Usman, 2024, p. 1330). Factors such as the alignment of employees' efforts with organizational strategy, empowerment through delegated authority, collaboration and teamwork, opportunities for self-development, receiving support and recognition, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment determine the level of employee engagement (Agustiani, Mora, & Ibad, 2024, p. 379).

Most studies in the literature have revealed that perceived overqualification has a negative direct or indirect relationship with work-related attitudes such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and job passion (Tomás et al., 2023; Zhang, Bolino, & Yin, 2022; Harari, Manapragada, & Viswesvaran, 2017). Perceived overqualification, which reflects an individual's belief that they possess more qualifications than required for the job (Liu & Wang, 2012), may highlight job inadequacy for employees who prioritize their personal career development. Based on this perspective, the current study investigates this relationship through the lens of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT). ODT posits that individuals strive to balance their needs for inclusion within a social group and for differentiation from it (Brewer, 1991). In other words, employees seek to feel accepted by the group (a sense of belonging) while also wanting to assert their uniqueness (a sense of distinctiveness). An imbalance between these two needs can significantly influence individuals' organizational behaviors.

Perceived overqualification refers to a situation in which individuals believe that their knowledge, skills, and experience exceed the requirements of their current job. This perception may weaken the sense of belonging to the group while simultaneously amplifying the desire to emphasize one's distinctiveness. Consequently, it may influence both the psychological bond with the organization and the type of motivation toward the job. In this study, perceived overqualification is examined in three dimensions: qualification, misfit, and simplicity. Each of these dimensions may have different impacts on individuals' needs for distinctiveness and belonging.

The qualification dimension pertains to the perception that one's capabilities exceed job requirements. Individuals who consider themselves "overqualified" compared to others may find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging to the group, potentially weakening their organizational ties. As a result, such individuals may struggle to develop harmonious job passion and may also avoid developing obsessive job passion. In this context, it is assumed that job passion may diminish due to the lack of fulfillment in a job that does not match one's needs, leading to the following hypotheses:

- **H1a:** Qualification dimension has a negative effect on employees' harmonious job passion
- **H1b:** Qualification dimension has a negative effect on employees' obsessive job passion

The misfit dimension reflects the perception that the job is not a good fit for the individual. This may lead to psychological disengagement from both the job and the organization. According to ODT, the need for belonging may be undermined under these circumstances. Consequently, a decrease in both harmonious and obsessive job passion is expected. To investigate this assumption, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H2a:** Misfit dimension has a negative effect on employees' harmonious job passion
- **H2b:** Misfit dimension has a negative effect on employees' obsessive job passion.

The simplicity dimension refers to the perception that the job fails to provide sufficient intellectual or professional challenge. When employees feel that their uniqueness is not appreciated and their abilities are underutilized, they may perceive the job as meaningless and lacking value. This could prevent the development of a healthy connection with the job. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are developed:

- **H3a:** Simplicity dimension has a negative effect on employees' harmonious job passion.
- **H3b:** Simplicity dimension has a negative effect on employees' obsessive job passion.

2.3. Trust in Coworker

Trust in coworker is a fundamental psychological construct that develops within the context of interpersonal relationships and influences cooperation, performance, and commitment in organizational life. Trust is defined as the willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations about another individual's intentions and behavior (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). This definition underscores the importance of considering trust both as a cognitive evaluative process and as an emotional state of attachment. Indeed, McAllister (1995, pp. 25–26) conceptualizes trust in two forms: cognitive and affective. Cognitive trust is grounded in rational assessments

of another person's competence, reliability, and integrity. In contrast, affective trust evolves over time through social interactions and reflects emotional bonds based on mutual care, concern, and sincerity. In this regard, cognitive trust is often seen as a prerequisite for the development of affective trust; that is, the individual must first perceive the coworker as "worth investing in emotionally," which is rooted in cognitive appraisals (McAllister, 1995, p. 30).

Research highlights the critical role of affective trust in fostering positive social exchange relationships among coworkers. Employees with high levels of affective trust are more inclined to cooperate, exhibit prosocial behaviors, and engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (Patrick & Kumar, 2019, p. 126). Therefore, trust in coworker plays a significant role in building social capital within the organization. Moreover, the presence of trust in the work environment has substantial implications for organizational outcomes. Studies in the literature indicate that trust enhances employees' engagement and contributes to improved performance and productivity (as cited in Patrick & Kumar, 2019, p. 127). Thus, trust in coworker should not be viewed merely as an interpersonal attitude but also as a strategic organizational resource.

In the context of job passion, trust in coworker is believed to foster a sense of psychological safety and nourish motivational resources such as autonomy, meaningfulness, and belonging (Nešić, Mitrović Veljković, Meško, & Bertonecel, 2020, pp. 1284–1286). Accordingly, it can be posited that trust in coworker may serve as a mediating variable in the relationship between individual perceptions such as perceived overqualification and motivational outcomes like job passion. Especially within the framework of the Overqualification Attribution Theory (OAT), perceived overqualification may lead individuals to feel socially disconnected from their groups, thereby triggering a need for belonging. However, restoring this balance requires the strengthening of social bonds. At this point, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2001) offers valuable insights into how individuals define themselves through membership in organizational groups. According to this theory, people derive part of their self-concept from their identification with social groups, and this identification significantly contributes to the development of self-esteem, belongingness, and interpersonal trust (Tajfel & Turner, 2001, pp. 104–106). When individuals perceive themselves as more qualified than other group members but are unable to identify with the group, they may experience an increased sense of social distance, making it more difficult to develop trust in their coworkers (van Knippenberg, 2000, p. 367). In this context, trust while inherently interpersonal can also be understood as an outcome of intragroup identity dynamics. Thus, group identity shapes emotional and cognitive perceptions of trust, but it can also act as a stabilizing mechanism to restore the motivational balance disrupted by overqualification. Within the scope of these theories, establishing trust-based relationships in the organizational environment becomes a critical factor supporting social integration. Trust in coworker can help employees reinforce their social ties and foster a sense of belonging within the group. Particularly, an employee who perceives themselves as more qualified than their peers may not view this difference as a threat if trustful relationships are in place. On the contrary, feeling accepted by the group may strengthen their sense of inclusion and help reconstruct their job passion.

From this perspective, the emphasis of Social Identity Theory on group belonging complements the explanatory structure of ODT, which highlights the balance between uniqueness and inclusion. When considered together, these two theoretical frameworks offer a more comprehensive understanding of how the sense of being accepted within a group interacts with trust dynamics to shape individuals' motivational orientations toward their work. In this framework, trust in coworker may function as a mediating variable in the relationship between perceived overqualification and work passion. This indirect effect suggests that an individual's psychological commitment to their work can be shaped—both in direction and intensity—through social bonds within the group. Based on this theoretical framework, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Trust in coworker mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and employees' job passion.

3. Method

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of perceived overqualification on job passion among aircraft maintenance technicians and to determine whether trust in coworker mediates this effect. To test the hypotheses and analyze the anticipated relationships, SPSS 25 and JAMOVI 2.3.28 statistical software were used. Data were collected between November 11 and December 7, 2024, after receiving approval from the Yozgat Bozok University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee dated October 23, 2024 with approval number 18/38.

3.1. Sample

The population of the study consists of aircraft maintenance technicians. Due to time and budget constraints, the minimum number of participants required for factor analysis was considered. According to the literature, a sample size five times greater than the number of variables to be analyzed is generally considered sufficient for reliable results (Streiner, 1994; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). In this context, a non-random sampling method was employed, and a questionnaire developed by the researchers was applied online to 227 participants who worked as aircraft maintenance technicians in the provinces of Isparta, Antalya, Ankara, and Malatya.

The reason for selecting aircraft maintenance technicians for the sample is that the qualified human factor forms the backbone of the aircraft maintenance system. Therefore, examining the factors that could impact this profession is considered crucial for the sustainability of the aviation industry.

3.2. Measurement Tools

The scales used in the research using the survey technique are given below.

Perceived Overqualification Scale:

The Perceived Overqualification Scale, which was developed by Johnson and Johnson (1996) and later translated into Turkish by Uçar and Zengin, consists of 13 items across 3 dimensions. The three dimensions of the Perceived Overqualification Scale are: Qualification Dimension (5 items), Misfit Dimension (4 items), and Simplicity Dimension (4 items). The two-factor structure of the scale was confirmed without item removal. The goodness-of-fit values for the factor

analysis are $\chi^2/sd = 2.491$, RMSEA = 0.081, CFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.984. In this study, the reliability coefficient for the Qualification Dimension subscale was found to be 0.850, for the Misfit Dimension subscale it was 0.879, and for the Simplicity Dimension subscale it was 0.697.

Trust in Coworkers Scale:

The three-item scale developed by Cook and Wall (1980) and adapted into Turkish by Çetinceli (2023) was used to measure trust in coworkers' reliable intentions. The scale is a 5-point Likert type (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree), and it includes statements such as "When I face difficulties at work, I know my coworkers will try to help me" and "I trust that my coworkers will help me when I need them." In this study, the Cronbach's Alpha (reliability) coefficient for the Trust in Coworkers Scale was found to be 0.814. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a scale is considered reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha is above 0.70, indicating that the Trust in Coworkers Scale is reliable in this study.

Job Passion Scale:

To measure the job passion of aircraft maintenance technicians, the Job Passion Scale developed by Vallerand et al. (2003) and adapted into Turkish by Güner Kibaroglu et al. was used. The scale is a 5-point Likert type and consists of 12 items and 2 dimensions (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). The two dimensions of the Job Passion Scale are: Harmonious Job Passion (6 items) and Obsessive Job Passion (6 items). The goodness-of-fit values for the two-factor structure of the Job Passion Scale are $\chi^2/sd = 2.176$, RMSEA = 0.072, CFI = 0.983, TLI = 0.78. In this study, the reliability coefficient for the Harmonious Passion subscale was calculated as 0.786, and for the Obsessive Passion subscale, it was 0.797.

3.3. Research Model and Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, it is hypothesized that the dimensions of perceived overqualification, namely Qualification Dimension, Misfit Dimension, and Simplicity Dimension, will have an effect on the dimensions of job passion, which are Harmonious Job Passion and Obsessive Job Passion. Furthermore, it is proposed that trust in coworker will play a mediating role in the relationship between perceived overqualification and job passion. The research model is illustrated below (Figure 1).

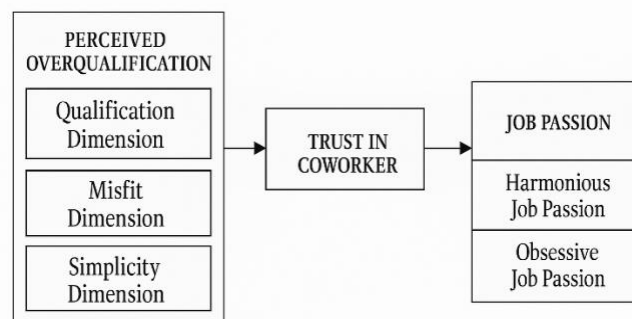


Figure 1. Research Model

In this study, the data consists of aircraft maintenance technicians working in the Turkish civil aviation sector. Before testing the model created in Figure 1, the data related to the normal distribution of the scales are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Values of the Scale

Scales	Sub-dimension	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficient	CR	AVE	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived overqualification	Qualification dimension	5		0.890	0.622		
	Misfit dimension	4	0.828	0.893	0.682	-.062	.162
	Simplicity dimension	4		0.722	0.501		
Trust in coworker	Trust in coworker	3	0.814	0.890	0.617	-.912	1.537
Job passion	Harmonious job passion	6	0.813	0.829	0.478	-.057	-.541
	Obsessive job passion	6		0.835	0.466		

In this research, missing data imputation was performed initially. Following the Mahalanobis distance values, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. Based on the data presented in Table 1, it was determined that the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of each scale included in the study were within the range of +1.5 to -1.5, indicating that the data is normally distributed (Kline, 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Furthermore, since the AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values are 0.466 and above, and the CR (Composite Reliability) values are greater than 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), it can be stated that convergent validity has been achieved for all the scales used in this study. Finally, the determination of discriminant validity for all variables was confirmed by the fact that the square roots of the average variance extracted are higher than the squared correlation coefficients between the variables (Kline, 2011). Based on this, the demonstration of convergent validity and discriminant validity also implies that construct validity has been ensured.

To test the hypotheses related to the research model that satisfies the normal distribution condition and convergent validity, Pearson correlation, multiple linear regression, and mediation analysis using Process 4.2 macro were conducted using SPSS 25 statistical software.

4. Result

The demographic characteristics of the study, which involved 227 aircraft maintenance technicians, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics

		f	%
Gender	Female	17	7.5%
	Male	210	92.5%
	25 years and below	16	7.0%
Age	26-33 years	74	32.6%
	34-41 years	102	44.9%
	42 years and above	35	15.4%
	Married	124	54.6%
Marital Status	Single	84	37.0%
	Prefer not to say	19	8.4%
	High School	13	5.7%
Education Level	Associate Degree	71	31.3%
	Bachelor's Degree	99	43.6%
	Postgraduate Degree	44	19.4%
	1-5 years	59	26.0%
Tenure in the Current Organization (Year)	6-10 years	73	32.2%
	11-15 years	50	22.0%
	16 years or more	45	19.8%

When examining Table 2, it is found that 17 of the aircraft maintenance technicians (7.5%) are female, and 210 (92.5%) are male. Regarding the age distribution of the participants, nearly half are in the 34-41 age range. 54.6% are married, 37% are single, and 8.4% did not specify their marital status. It was determined that 63% of the participants have an educational level of either college or graduate/postgraduate studies. Finally, concerning the participants' length of tenure in their current workplaces, 26% have worked for 1-5 years, 32.2% for 6-10 years, 22% for 11-15 years, and 19.8% for 16 years or more.

Table 3. Correlations Between Research Variables

Variables	Ort.	Std.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Qualification Dimension	19.96	3.37	(1)					
2. Misfit Dimension	10.76	4.45	0.290**	(1)				
3. Simplicity Dimension	12.41	3.53	0.321**	0.297**	(1)			
4. Trust in Coworker	12.57	1.74	0.159*	0.144*	0.083	(1)		
5. Harmonious Job Passion	23.59	3.47	0.421**	0.241**	-0.043	0.157	(1)	
6. Obsessive Job Passion	17.32	4.69	0.301**	-0.115	0.062	-0.052	0.340**	(1)

*p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Table 3 presents the correlation analysis results. It was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between the dimension of perceived qualification ($r = 0.421$; $p < 0.01$) and attribution ($r = 0.241$; $p < 0.01$) with harmonious job passion. In contrast, a negative, non-significant relationship was observed between the dimension of simplicity dimension and harmonious job passion ($r = -0.043$; $p > 0.01$). A positive and significant relationship was found between qualification dimension and obsessive job passion ($r = 0.301$; $p < 0.01$). However, a negative, non-significant relationship was detected between attribution and obsessive job passion ($r = -0.115$; $p > 0.01$), and a positive, non-significant relationship was found between simplicity dimension and obsessive job passion ($r = 0.062$; $p > 0.01$). Lastly, a positive, non-significant relationship was found between trust in coworker and harmonious job passion ($r = 0.157$; $p > 0.01$), while a negative, non-significant relationship

was found between trust in coworker and obsessive job passion ($r = -0.052$; $p > 0.01$).

Based on the correlation findings, the regression results aiming to reveal the effect of the dimensions of perceived

Table 4. Regression Analysis Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable(s)	Beta	t	p	F	Model (p)	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Durbin-Watson
Model I					23.682	.000**	.242	.231	1.861
Harmonious Job Passion	Intercept	15.844	12.507	.000**					
	Qualification dimension	0.458	7.055	.000**					
	Misfit dimension	0.143	2.928	.004*					
	Simplicity dimension	-0.237	-3.801	.000**					

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

As shown in Table 4, Model I, which includes the dimensions of perceived overqualification (qualification, misfit, and simplicity dimensions), is statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.242$; $F_{(3, 222)} = 23.682$; $p < 0.01$). This model explains 24.2% of the total variance in harmonious job passion. Within the model, qualification dimension has a statistically significant and positive effect on harmonious job passion ($\beta =$

overqualification on the dimensions of job passion are presented in Table 4 and Table 5.

0.458; $p < 0.01$), and underestimation also shows a statistically significant and positive effect on harmonious job passion ($\beta = 0.143$; $p < 0.05$). In contrast, simplicity dimension has a statistically significant and negative effect on harmonious job passion ($\beta = -0.237$; $p < 0.01$). Accordingly, while hypotheses H1a and H2a are rejected, hypothesis H3a is supported.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results

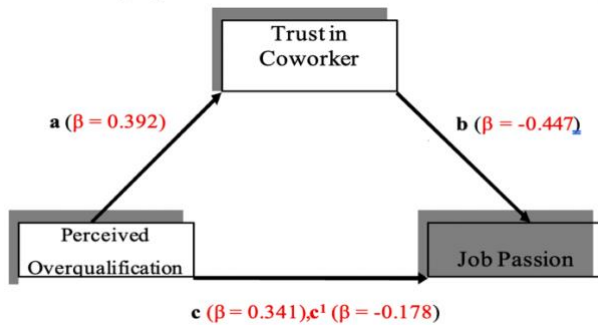
Dependent Variable	Independent Variable(s)	Beta	t	p	F	Model (p)	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Durbin-Watson
Model II					11.599	.000**	.135	.123	1.614
Obsessive Job Passion	Intercept	9.621	5.270	.000**					
	Qualification dimension	0.503	5.369	.000**					
	Misfit dimension	-0.235	-3.337	.001**					
	Simplicity dimension	0.015	.171	.865					

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

As shown in Table 5, Model II, which includes the dimensions of perceived overqualification (qualification, misfit, and simplicity dimensions), is statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.135$; $F_{(3, 222)} = 11.599$; $p < 0.01$). This model explains 13.5% of the total variance in obsessive job passion. The results indicate that qualification dimension has a statistically significant and positive effect on obsessive job passion ($\beta = 0.503$; $p < 0.01$), and misfit dimension has a statistically significant and negative effect on obsessive job passion ($\beta = -0.235$; $p < 0.05$). However, the simplicity dimension has a statistically positive but non-significant effect on obsessive job passion ($\beta = 0.015$; $p > 0.01$). Accordingly, while hypotheses H1b and H3b were rejected, hypothesis H2b was supported.

Following the regression analyses, the mediating effects were tested. To determine whether the mediation is partial or full, the assumptions of Baron and Kenny (1986) were considered. According to their method (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1176), three conditions must be met to establish mediation:

(a) the independent variable must significantly affect the mediator, (b) the mediator must significantly affect the dependent variable, and (c) the independent variable must significantly affect the dependent variable. Additionally, the absence of zero within the bootstrap confidence interval and a decrease in the beta coefficient when the variables are included in the same model indicate mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Furthermore, if the Z-score from the Sobel Test exceeds 1.96 and is statistically significant, the mediating effect can be considered significant (Frazier et al., 2004). In this context, to test the mediating effect, Model 4 of the PROCESS macro version 4.2 was employed (Preacher et al., 2007). The statistical significance of the model and the bootstrapping analyses were conducted using the same software, with a 95% confidence interval and 5,000 bootstrap samples.

Table 6. Mediating Analysis Results

Sobel test: 2,972; $p=0,002$

When Table 6 is examined, it is found that the standardized regression coefficient for path "a" is 0.392 with a significance level of 0.001; for path "b" the coefficient is -0.447 with a significance level of 0.05; and for path "c" the coefficient is 0.341 with a significance level of 0.001. In light of this information, it is evident that all three conditions of Baron and Kenny have been met. However, in order to fully confirm the presence of a mediating effect, it must be checked whether path c1 becomes non-significant or shows a decrease in effect when the independent and mediating variables are included in the model simultaneously. When examining path "c1" ($\beta = -0.178$; $p = 0.001$), it is observed that there is a decrease compared to path "c". Although this indicates the presence of a mediating effect, it is not sufficient on its own; the significance of the mediating effect should be confirmed by evaluating the Sobel test Z-score. Since the Z-score for this model was found to be 2.293, which is greater than 1.96 and statistically significant, it can be concluded that a mediating effect exists. Thus, the H4 hypothesis is supported.

When Table 7, which presents the overall status of the hypotheses, is examined, it is observed that hypotheses H2b, H3a, and H4 are supported, whereas the other hypotheses are rejected.

Table 7. Hypotheses Table

Hypotheses	Accepted/Rejected
H_{1a}: Qualification dimension has a negative effect on employees' harmonious job passion.	Rejected
H_{1b}: Qualification dimension has a negative effect on employees' obsessive job passion.	Rejected
H_{2a}: Misfit dimension has a negative effect on employees' harmonious job passion.	Rejected
H_{2b}: Misfit dimension has a negative effect on employees' obsessive job passion.	Accepted
H_{3a}: Simplicity dimension has a negative effect on employees' harmonious job passion.	Accepted
H_{3b}: Simplicity dimension has a negative effect on employees' obsessive job passion.	Rejected
H₄: Trust in coworker plays a mediating role in the relationship between perceived overqualification and employees' job passion.	Accepted

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated how different dimensions of perceived overqualification namely, qualification, misfit, and simplicity influence job passion, both harmonious and

obsessive, within the theoretical framework of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory. Furthermore, it examined whether trust in coworkers serves as a mediating mechanism in these relationships. The findings extend existing literature by demonstrating that perceived overqualification does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes, challenging traditional assumptions in the field.

Contrary to the initial hypotheses (H_{1a} and H_{1b}), which posited that perceived overqualification would negatively impact harmonious and obsessive job passion, the findings revealed a positive relationship between perceived overqualification and both types of job passion. This result does not support the assumption proposed in the conceptual framework that overqualification weakens a sense of belonging and thereby diminishes passion for work. However, within the context of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), this unexpected outcome highlights another theoretical possibility. When individuals perceive that their capabilities exceed job requirements, they may experience a heightened need for differentiation. This drive to stand out may, paradoxically, fuel greater passion for work, as employees seek to validate their qualifications and distinguish themselves within the organization or group. In such cases, perceived overqualification may simultaneously trigger the need for uniqueness while enhancing one's sense of belonging particularly when the organization acknowledges and values such distinctiveness. Therefore, instead of interpreting overqualification strictly as a barrier to group integration, it may function as a dual motivational force that strengthens job passion in organizational settings where distinctiveness and inclusion are balanced. In addition to ODT, this finding can also be interpreted through the lens of Compensatory Control Theory (CCT). According to CCT, when individuals face uncertainty, threat, or a perceived loss of control, they seek alternative psychological means to restore a sense of order and meaning (Kay et al., 2009). Perceived overqualification may create a sense of status threat or meaninglessness, stemming from the feeling that one's potential is unrecognized. However, some individuals may respond to this threat by becoming more invested in their work seeking to regain control through enhanced engagement, improved performance, or a deeper search for meaning. This compensatory mechanism is likely to be more salient in complex, high-risk, and skill-intensive work environments, such as the one examined in this study aircraft maintenance technicians in the aviation industry. In such contexts, perceived overqualification may not be seen as a misfit or deficiency, but rather as a form of privilege a resource that can be transformed into higher performance. Thus, the findings diverge from previous studies that have suggested overqualification diminishes job passion (Karagöz, 2023; Özel & Yılmaz, 2025) and instead point to alternative psychological processes whereby individuals mobilize internal resources to restore psychological equilibrium. In this light, the potential loss of control or meaning induced by overqualification may be compensated through enhanced job passion, consistent with the assumptions of CCT.

The findings related to the second hypothesis revealed a nuanced relationship between perceived misfit and job passion. Specifically, misfit perception was found to have a positive effect on harmonious passion (H_{2a}), but a negative effect on obsessive passion (H_{2b}). This indicates that the impact of perceived misfit on job passion may vary depending on the type of passion involved. According to ODT, perceived misfit may weaken one's need for belonging, thereby

diminishing emotional bonds with the organization and reducing both harmonious and obsessive job passion. In this study, however, only H_{2b} was supported, partially validating this assumption. The negative link between misfit and obsessive passion suggests that when individuals perceive a poor fit between themselves and their job, they may struggle to emotionally identify with their work in a rigid or compulsive manner. However, the unexpected positive relationship between misfit and harmonious passion suggests an alternative theoretical interpretation. It implies that individuals may develop harmonious passion for work even when they believe the job is not an ideal fit. This voluntary engagement may stem from adaptive psychological mechanisms aimed at preserving personal meaning or purpose. As previously discussed, this pattern is also consistent with CCT, which posits that individuals facing psychological threats such as lack of meaning, structure, or identity fit seek alternative sources of stability (Kay et al., 2009). Perceived misfit may lead individuals to feel that their work does not reflect their identity or allow for authentic self-expression. Yet, they may compensate for this incongruence by investing emotionally in the job through social relationships, a desire to contribute, or alignment with a higher purpose. This kind of voluntary engagement can be viewed as an expression of the individual's desire to "claim space" within the organization and to construct meaning despite perceived misalignment. As such, even a job that is not fully compatible with one's self-concept may be psychologically embraced, resulting in elevated levels of harmonious passion. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the positive outcomes of overqualification, such as the study by Erdogan et al. (2011), which showed that certain compensatory factors such as growth opportunities or social support can make a job more attractive to employees. In this respect, the current result underscores the idea that regardless of the objective quality of the job, individuals' pursuit of psychological equilibrium plays a critical role in shaping their passion for work.

In line with the third hypothesis, the findings indicate that perceived simplicity has a negative effect on harmonious passion (H_{3a}), while it has no significant effect on obsessive passion (H_{3b}). The first result suggests that when employees perceive their work as mentally or professionally unchallenging, they are less likely to engage with it in a self-driven and intrinsically motivated manner. From the perspective of ODT, this may reflect a failure to fulfill individuals' need for uniqueness and skill expression. When employees are unable to demonstrate their competencies, the work may be experienced as meaningless or unfulfilling, thereby reducing their internal commitment to it. This interpretation aligns with prior research, such as Gizlier (2021), which found that low-challenge tasks are associated with decreased job engagement. However, the absence of a significant effect of perceived simplicity on obsessive passion (H_{3b}) represents a theoretically unexpected finding and contributes a novel insight to the existing literature. While perceived simplicity may indeed undermine motivation, it does not appear to elicit the rigid, emotionally driven attachment that characterizes obsessive passion. This can be interpreted through the lens of CCT. Although simple tasks may create a cognitive void by threatening an individual's sense of meaning, responsibility, or status, they may fail to trigger compensatory attachment mechanisms. In other words, individuals may not feel compelled to forcefully maintain a connection to work they perceive as unchallenging. This

suggests that when a task lacks complexity, employees may disengage without experiencing the internal pressure typical of obsessive passion. The finding implies that identity-based identification with the job does not occur under conditions of perceived simplicity, and thus obsessive attachment is not activated. In this context, the motivational loss caused by simplicity is reflected in reduced harmonious passion, but it is not compensated through a sense of obligation or inner compulsion associated with obsessive passion. This points to the possibility that in low-complexity roles, employees may struggle to form psychological bonds with their work and may not seek alternative routes to restore control or meaning, thereby resulting in diminished intrinsic engagement without compulsive compensation.

The final finding of this study supports Hypothesis 4, indicating that trust in coworkers mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and job passion. Notably, when trust was included in the model, the direct positive effect of overqualification on job passion decreased, suggesting a paradoxical mediation effect.

This finding echoes the work of Chiu et al. (2018), who emphasize that trust can exert both constructive and destructive effects depending on contextual factors. This result challenges a core assumption of ODT that trust unequivocally fosters belonging. For overqualified individuals, trust-based relationships with coworkers may amplify awareness of their own distinctiveness, thereby reinforcing feelings of being "different" from the group. As a result, the sense of not belonging may be heightened, leading to a reduction in job passion despite the presence of interpersonal trust. This dynamic can be better understood by incorporating insights from Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 2001), which posits that individuals derive self-concept, belonging, and self-esteem from their group membership. When individuals perceive themselves as more qualified than their peers, this can disrupt the identification process with the group. While trust in coworkers typically fosters inclusion, it may paradoxically intensify perceptions of "otherness" for those who feel overqualified ultimately weakening social identity and diminishing job passion. Derricks, & Sekaquaptewa (2021) revealed that a climate of trust may provide individuals with positive emotional support; however, social comparisons—especially among individuals who perceive themselves as minorities—can weaken their sense of belonging and negatively affect their engagement and passion for work. Trust, in this view, becomes not just a socio-emotional resource but also a mechanism for reassessing one's position within the group. Thus, the role of trust appears dualistic: in some contexts, it enhances belonging and nurtures job passion; in others, it heightens social comparisons and alienation. For instance, Patrick, & Kumar (2019) found that trust can foster job passion by strengthening social bonds and promoting voluntary commitment, yet the direction of its influence may depend on how individuals perceive their status within the group. Although few existing studies explicitly examine this dual function of trust, the present findings provide a theoretical foundation for future inquiry. Ultimately, the impact of trust on group identity may vary according to context, culture, and individual characteristics. Therefore, further research across diverse samples particularly those focused on group identity strength is necessary to test the generalizability of this finding.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the impact of perceived overqualification on job passion should not be

understood in a one-dimensional or inherently negative way. Notably, the findings indicate that perceptions of overqualification and misfit can actually enhance individuals' passion for their work, as they seek to make their qualifications visible and transform their distinctiveness into meaningful contributions. However, a key insight from the study is that trust in coworkers may indirectly attenuate this positive effect. This suggests that social bonds are not universally supportive; in some cases, they may reinforce feelings of difference rather than belonging. These dynamics were observed in a sample of aviation maintenance technicians, professionals working in highly specialized roles requiring technical expertise raising the possibility that the findings may be sector-specific. Accordingly, future studies should explore the generalizability of these results across other occupational contexts. It is also important to note that all variables in this study were based on self-reported perceptions. Future research could benefit from incorporating objective indicators, such as turnover rates or performance evaluations, to triangulate these findings.

From an organizational management perspective, it is critical to foster a work environment in which the potential of overqualified employees is recognized, and their distinct strengths are leveraged, rather than treating them as problematic outliers. In light of issues such as unemployment and financial insecurity, overqualified individuals may actively seek alternative opportunities. Therefore, it is recommended that organizations design enriched roles with clear advancement pathways for such employees.

Additionally, it is essential to monitor whether trust-based interactions within the workplace genuinely enhance the sense of belonging for overqualified individuals—or, paradoxically, highlight their differences and hinder integration.

Ethical approval

The approval of this research was authorized by the Yozgat Bozok University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 18/38 dated October 23, 2024.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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