

Perceived Overqualification and Work Alienation: Examining The Roles of Relative Deprivation and Mastery Experiences

Algılanan Aşırı Niteliklilik ve İşe Yabancılaşma: Göreceli Yoksunluk ve İş Dışı Başarı Aktivitelerinin Rolünün İncelenmesi

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of perceived overqualification on work alienation and the mediating roles of relative deprivation and mastery experiences in this relationship. A quantitative study based on mediation analysis was conducted for this objective. The research was based on data obtained from 260 manufacturing employees. The study revealed that perceived overqualification had a significant impact on work alienation. Due to the direction of influence, the mediating roles of relative deprivation and mastery experiences in this relationship differ. The findings suggest that employees are affected by perceived overqualification, which is heightened by relative deprivation but buffered by mastery experiences, which allow employees to use skills and abilities they do not use on the work. As far as our knowledge, it is also one of the first research in the field of organizational behavior to investigate the relationship between perceived overqualification and work alienation via the mediation effects of relative deprivation and mastery experiences.

Keywords: Perceived Overqualification, Work Alienation, Relative Deprivation, Mastery Experiences

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, algılanan aşırı nitelikliliğin işe yabancılaşma üzerindeki etkisinin yanı sıra bu etkide göreceli yoksunluk ve iş dışı başarı aktivitelerinin aracı rollerini araştırmaktır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, aracılık analizine dayalı nicel bir araştırma yapılmıştır. Araştırma, 260 üretim çalışanından elde edilen verilere dayanmaktadır. Çalışma, algılanan aşırı nitelikliliğin işe yabancılaşma üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisinin olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Etki yönüne göre bu ilişkide göreceli yoksunluk ve iş dışı başarı aktivitelerinin aracılık rolleri farklılık göstermektedir. Bulgular, çalışanların algılanan aşırı niteliklilikten etkilenmesini göreceli yoksunlukla arttığını iş dışı başarı aktivitelerinin çalışanların işte kullanmadıkları beceri ve yetenekleri kullanmalarına olanak sağlayarak bu etkiyi tamponladığını göstermektedir. Aynı zamanda, bildiğimiz kadarıyla, göreceli yoksunluk ve iş dışı başarı aktivitelerinin aracılık etkileri kapsamında algılanan aşırı niteliklilik ve işe yabancılaşma arasındaki ilişkiyi araştıran örgütsel davranış alanındaki ilk araştırmalardan biridir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan Aşırı Niteliklilik, İşe Yabancılaşma, Göreceli Yoksunluk, İş Dışı Başarı Aktiviteleri

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Introduction

Employees need to learn and improve new abilities and skills in order to adapt to changing working situations and organizational environments. Therefore, before joining the workforce, individuals focus on acquiring various skills and talents as part of their career planning (Vaisey, 2006). However, suppose they cannot employ the skills and abilities they have gained while working. In that case, management practices such as job enrichment and job enlargement can be used to design jobs for motivation and job satisfaction (Chung & Ross, 1977; Parker, 1998). However, despite all these practices, the management needs to develop new perspectives to explain the perceived overqualification, which is the subjective judgment that the individual will develop regarding that these skills and abilities are beyond the job's requirements.

Perceived overqualification emerges as a process in which the individual performs poorly, exhibits counterproductive behaviors, and alienates from the job as a result of his/her thought that the job does not deserve him or her (Erdogan, Tomás, Valls, & Gracia, 2018; Liu, Luksyte, Zhou, Shi, & Wang, 2015). From the perspective of relative deprivation theory, this process is shaped by subjective judgments such as anger and resentment (Pettigrew, 2016; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012), which emerge because of comparisons such as doing the same job with co-workers even though they do not have the same skills and abilities, or people with the same abilities and skills working in better conditions (Feldman, Leana, & Bolino, 2002). The management challenge of ensuring high performance without losing the employee is vital at this point. Furthermore, this study suggests that mastery experiences during the off-job time, such as sports, learning a new language, or dealing with art, can cope with the adverse effects of perceived overqualification. This study, which aimed to address whether mastery experiences and relative deprivation have mediating roles on the individual's work alienation as a result of perceived overqualification, is critical for organizations that strive to create highly productive, happy employees in the workplace. It's also one of the first studies to our knowledge in the field of organizational behaviour to explore at the relationship between the perceived overqualification and the mastery experiences.

1. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

1.1. Perceived Overqualification and Work Alienation

Perceived overqualification is the subjective judgment of employees that they believe that their qualifications are superior to those required by their position (Arvan, Pindek, Anđel, & Spector, 2019; Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). Overqualified workers may have adequate or even more excellent skills to accomplish their main activities. Yet, they cannot use valued abilities, and their requirements for challenging and emotionally motivating activities are likely to be unmet, resulting in increasing tension (Edwards, 2008; Wassermann, Fujishiro, & Hoppe, 2017). It has adverse consequences on employees' behaviors and organizations, including job dissatisfaction (Arvan et al., 2019; Harari, Manapragada, & Viswesvaran, 2017), reduced organizational commitment (Liu & Wang, 2012), more significant psychological anxiety (Zhao, Zhao, Zeng, & Bai, 2021), increased turnover intention (Vinayak, Bhatnagar, & Agarwal, 2021), and counterproductive behavior (Liu et al., 2015). Work alienation is a psychological situation that occurs when an employee's needs or expectations are not met by their job (Shantz, Alfes, Bailey, & Soane, 2015). Employee perspectives of the job environment, which highlights individual psychological feelings, are reflected in work alienation. The fundamental cause of workplace alienation is when employment fails to meet the requirements and expectations of employees. Employees feel alienated if there is a disconnect between their job and expectations and if employees' skills aren't utilized at work (Yu, Yang, Wang, Sun, & Hu, 2021). Employees who believe they have more qualifications than their jobs demand may experience work alienation because of perceived overqualification. Therefore, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived overqualification affect work alienation

1.2. The Mediating Role of Relative Deprivation

Depending on the relative deprivation theory, people's subjective assessments of their job status directly impact their sentiments and reactions to their environment (Ren, Bolino, Shaffer, & Kraimer, 2013). When people want something and believe they are entitled to it but cannot achieve it, they become frustrated (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). The disparity between what an individual has and what he believes he merits can result in a variety of adverse reactions. (Smith et al., 2012). Overqualification that is seen as such can easily result in a feeling of relative deprivation. Employees with academic qualifications and a wide range of abilities and expertise have high expectations for their existing employment situation. When people in comparison their employment situation to the status they expect and think they deserve, in the case that they find their job status isn't what they deserve, they experience deprivation. Overqualified professionals, as an instance, are more reactive to focusing solely on job skills and are concerned with their peers' abilities and performance (Hu et al., 2015). They are inclined to feel deprived if they realize that individuals around themselves are not as qualified but perform the same job (Erdogan et al., 2018). Disappointment, job stress, burnout, resentment, and discomfort can all result from feeling deprived (Chiaburu, Thundiyil, & Wang, 2014), thus leading to work alienation. Therefore, we expect:

Hypothesis 2: Relative deprivation mediates the effect of perceived overqualification on work alienation

1.3. The mediating role of Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences are characterized as challenging experiences and learning opportunities during the off-job time in other domains. These activities allow an individual to examine his/her competency and proficiency in terms of his/her talents and abilities. Learning a new language, picking up a new hobby, and participating in sports activities are all typical examples of these activities (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2006). Likewise, volunteer activity in which an individual can put his or her abilities and skills to good use is assessed within this framework (Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002).

Mastery experiences are a type of activity in which an individual pushes his or her limits and even challenges his or her skills and abilities (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). These are not simple experiences, but they do demand self-regulation as challenging tasks. For example, to participate in a sporting activity with friends after a long day at work, an individual must be able to overcome the urge to rest at home lazily in the evening without doing anything. Although mastery experiences impose new burdens and responsibilities on the individual, they allow him to put his skills and abilities to good use and feel pleasure from the fulfillment of internal resources such as self-efficacy (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1997). Off-job time mastery experiences also contribute to a happier mood. (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008). However, according to empirical studies, there is a negative relationship between mastery experiences and burnout (Els Crizelle, Mostert Karina, & De Beer Leon T., 2015).

Similarly, striving to reach a higher skill level in these experiences contributes to professional and individual development (Sonnentag & Natter, 2004). By enabling the individual to use the skills and abilities that he or she can partially use or not use during working, mastery experiences affect both perceived overqualification and the negative consequences of perceived overqualification (Han & Hwang, 2021). On the other hand, mastery experiences may reduce the impression of relative deprivation, which happens due to comparing oneself to his colleagues, whom he believes do not have the same abilities and skills as himself. As a result, the individual's success in mastery experience where he can apply his skills and abilities and the social structure will alleviate the relative deprivation symptoms and enhance the individual's positive well-being. Therefore, we expect:

Hypothesis 3: Mastery experience mediates the effect of perceived overqualification on work alienation

2. Method

2.1. Sample and procedure

We drew our sample from a prominent Turkish organization located in Ankara. The organization is a manufacturing company providing high-tech products for the government, defence sectors, and international companies. Approximately 420 employees work in this company. This sample is relevant in terms of our research question. Because employees in this company are highly educated. On the other hand, according to company's human resource manager, employers also prefer applicants with more qualifications than required. Because they believe it is difficult to predict when and which qualifications will be necessary for high-tech firms and that these qualified employees are critical in keeping up with rapid environmental change.

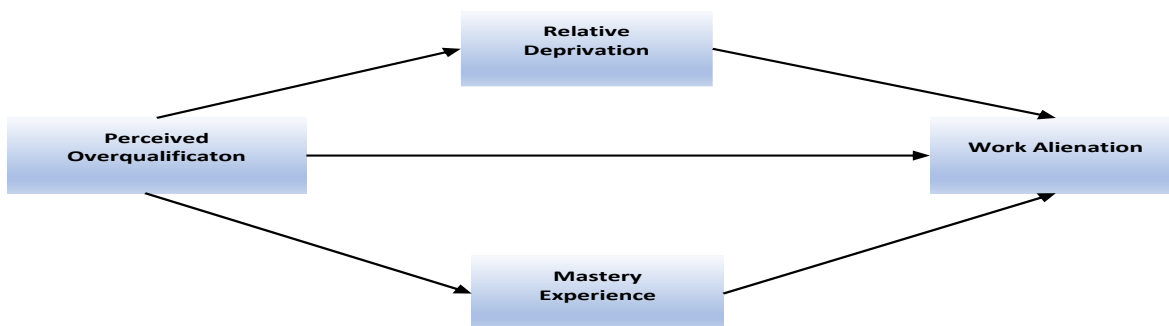


Figure 1. Proposed Research Model

The survey was open to all employees, and they were all encouraged to participate. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants' confidentiality and anonymity were assured. 282 employees completed the survey. After

missing values were removed, a valid sample of 263 employees was obtained. Table 1 shows summary statistics about the studied sample's demographics.

Table 1. Characteristics of The Studied Sample (N = 263)

	M	SD	Min	Max
Age (all participants)	36.20	7.50	23	69
Age (men)	36.90	6.96	24	65
Age (women)	33.81	8.74	23	69
Working Year (all participants)	9.61	6.82	1	45
Working Year (men)	9.90	6.49	1	33
Working Year (women)	8.61	7.81	1	45
		n		%
Gender				
Men		203		77.2
Women		60		22.8
Marital				
Marital (men)		191		72.6
Marital (women)		72		27.4
Education				
Undergraduate		76		28.9
Postgraduate		67		25.5
PhD		120		45.6

2.2. Measures

In this study, participants were asked to answer the questions based on Likert's 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The research instrument, which has a total of 25 items, was translated with two specialist researchers with field expertise and English proficiency, as well as two expert English instructors, and was translated from the original language of the scale into Turkish for the study of Turkish adaption. Following that, with the consent of specialist researchers and lecturers, a field investigation was done to see if there was a semantic shift by back-translating the scale items into English. The reliability of the questions was measured with Cronbach's Alpha (measured $\alpha > 0.7$ in all variables). Linear relationships between variables were measured with Pearson Correlation.

Mastery Experience: Mastery experience is measured with a 4 item scale developed by Sonnentag and Fritz (2007). An example of an item is 'I seek out intellectual challenges.'. Internal consistency reliability was 0.82.

Perceived Overqualification: Perceived overqualification is measured with a 9 item scale developed by Maynard, Joseph, and Maynard (2006). An example of an item 'My previous training is not being fully utilized in this job.' Internal consistency reliability was 0.77

Relative Deprivation: Relative deprivation is measured with a 4 item scale developed by Callan, Ellard, Will Shead, and Hodgins (2008). An example of an item is 'When I compare what I have with others, I realize that I am quite well off.' Internal consistency reliability was 0.71.

Work Alienation: Work alienation is measured with an 8 item scale developed by Nair and Vohra (2009). An example of an item is 'Over the years I have become disillusioned about my work'. Internal consistency reliability was 0.79.

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix. All the variables except mastery experience and relative deprivation correlation were significantly and positively correlated with each-others ($p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Results of The Descriptive Statistics And Pearson's Correlation Analysis (N= 263)

	M	SD	WA	PO	RD	ME
WA	2.19	0.71	1	0.32**	0.55**	-0.32**
PO	2.28	0.67	0.32**	1	0.37**	0.33**
RD	2.79	0.89	0.55**	0.37**	1	-0.19

ME	3.53	0.92	-0.32**	0.33**	-0.19	1
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Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). PO = Perceived Overqualification, WA = Work Alienation, RD = Relative Deprivation, ME = Mastery Experience.

Correlation coefficients greater than 0.70, in general, may enhance the probability of multicollinearity in a regression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). However, all correlations were below this criterion in our analysis, indicating that all measures were suitable for inclusion in the study. In addition, as shown in Table 3, all variance inflation factors in the regressions were less than 2. This suggests that multicollinearity isn't a critical challenge in our research (Thompson, Kim, Aloe, & Becker, 2017). We can't test for casual relationships because all of the measurements in our study were obtained simultaneously. As a result, the reported results should be viewed as non-directional relationships. The normality of the distribution is one of the conditions for statistical analysis. To check the normality of the variables' skewness and kurtosis were analysed. +1.5 and -1.5 are the maximum and minimum values, respectively. For the sake of this study, the distribution was assumed to be normal (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The variables' Cronbach's alpha values were also investigated, and the scales were found to be quite reliable (Zinbarg, Revelle, Yovel, & Li, 2005).

Table 3. Normality, Collinearity, Reliability Analysis Results

	Skewness	Kurtosis	Tolarace	VIF	Alpha
WA	0.61	0.51	0.59	1.67	0.79
PO	0.47	0.03	0.74	1.34	0.77
RD	0.21	-0.44	0.83	1.19	0.71
ME	-0.44	-0.55	0.86	1.15	0.82

2.3.2. Hypotheses testing

To test the suggested hypotheses, PROCESS macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2017) was used. With a sample size of 5000 and a 95 percent confidence interval, bootstrapping was used to assess the indirect effect (Hayes, 2009). The indirect effect's significance is determined by whether the confidence intervals include 0, as shown by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Perceived overqualification had a positively significant effect on work alienation (.33, $p < .05$) (Table 4). Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 4. Path Analysis Result (N = 263)

Path	Coefficients	p	LLCI	ULCI
PO > WA	0.33	.000*	0.21	0.45

Note: * $p < .05$

The findings also revealed that perceived overqualification had a significant indirect effect on work alienation via relative deprivation (.19, CI [.13,.26]). As a result, relative deprivation partially mediated the relationship between perceived overqualification and work alienation, indicating that hypothesis 2 is justified. The indirect effect of perceived overqualification on work alienation via mastery experience, on the other hand, was significant (-.17, CI [-.23, -.10]) (Table 5). As a result, the association between perceived overqualification and work alienation was partially moderated by mastery experience, supporting hypothesis 3.

Table 5. Mediation Results

Path	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	LLCI	ULCI
PO > RD > WA	0.33	0.14	0.19	0.13	0.26

PO	>	ME	>	WA	0.33	0.50	-0.17	-0.23	-0.10
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Note: PO =Perceived Overqualification, WA = Work Alienation, RD = Relative Deprivation, ME = Mastery Experience. LLCI = Lower-Level Confidence Interval, ULCI = Upper-Level Confidence Interval. N = 263. $p < .05$, $p < .005$.

3. Discussion and Implications

We developed and tested a model in this paper to investigate why and when perceived overqualification is linked to work alienation, employing relative deprivation and mastery experiences as a mediator. All the relationship hypotheses we constructed in our model were supported. Perceived overqualification was positively related to work alienation, as expected. Relative deprivation and mastery experiences mediated the relationships between perceived overqualification and work alienation.

We obtained some enriching findings for the literature as well. Although indirect effects of perceived overqualification on work alienation through relative deprivation were positively significant (According to the findings, any who perceived overqualified were more prone to experiencing relative deprivation and, as a result, higher work alienation), indirect effects of perceived overqualification on work alienation through mastery experience were negatively significant, as expected. This means mastery experiences mitigate perceived overqualification's adverse effects.

Our paper adds to the body of knowledge in several ways. First, there seems to be little research on the effects of perceived overqualification and how employees can cope with unfavorable consequences when they feel overqualified (Wassermann et al., 2017). Work alienation was found to be a result of perceived overqualification, according to our research. In other words, perceived overqualification is linked to broader indices of one's well-being and off-job activities, in addition to having frustration in consequence of comparing self with others. Second, our research offers value by focusing on an often-cited but empirically unexplored factor. Although relative deprivation is frequently used in the overqualification literature to explain why perceived overqualification affects diverse consequences (e.g., Luksyte & Spitzmueller, 2016), rare scholars (Erdogan et al., 2018) examined relative deprivation as a mediator to our knowledge. The significance of this mediator was empirically proven in our investigation. Lastly, we suggested mastery experience as a mediator as well. We observed, as hypothesized that mastery experience is a significant mediator of the relationship between perceived overqualification and work alienation. The adverse effects of perceived overqualification on work alienation were lesser when mastery experience was strong. In other saying, perceived overqualification was more effective in terms of work alienation for employees who experience mastery experience less. This conclusion is significant because it implies that perceived overqualification is not a harmful situation for individuals who participate in off-job activities since they have the opportunity to use talents and abilities that they do not use at work.

Our findings revealed that overqualification feelings lead to negative situations on the individual. For this reason, first of all, as a result, when choosing a profession, it is critical that individuals focus on the job and position that most closely matches their skills and abilities. On the other hand, these findings have practical implications for institutions, career services, and managers. Universities should collaborate with career centers to provide career counseling to their students. They should be advised about the professions or professional positions they should apply for even before they graduate, based on their abilities and skills. Finally, managers should direct employees who experience overqualification to off-job activities. It should ensure that its employees participate in social responsibility projects voluntarily. It should open up domains where individuals can use skills and abilities that they cannot use at work. At the same time, the facilities where off-job activities such as sports activities will be held for these employees working in rural and provincial areas should be considered throughout the planning stage.

Conclusion

Our findings suggest that perceived overqualification has inferences for work alienation and off-job activities. In addition, this research provides empirical evidence for the significance of relative deprivation and mastery experiences as mediators. Finally, our findings suggest that perceived overqualification has adverse consequences for employees who experience substantial relative deprivation, which is associated with work alienation. Mastery experiences can help to mitigate these adverse effects. Our findings demonstrate the need to use a cognitive perspective to understand the consequences of perceived overqualification. Future studies of perceived overqualification would benefit from analyses of a wide range of psychological outcomes and other boundary conditions.

Although every effort was made to avoid the study's limitations, the study was found to have some. It should be considered, especially when looking into work alienation, that employees may have avoided delivering honest replies on this subject. Even though it is declared to be confidential and not shared with third parties, this is treated as a limitation. Furthermore,

the research was limited to the province of Ankara and the manufacturing sector. In terms of generalizability, this is also a limitation. The findings of this study clear up the investigation of perceived overqualification and its relationship to leadership. In this context, the effects of paternalistic, ethical, and authentic leadership styles on perceived overqualification should be investigated. Similarly, various sectors and samples will contribute to the expansion of relevant literature.

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