

Businesses may benefit from 'overqualified' employees

December 11 2015, by Michael O. Garvey



Overqualification—the condition of employees who believe that their qualifications exceed the requirements of their jobs—has been widely considered harmful for organizations, which is why most companies tend to screen out such job applicants.

But Jasmine Hu and Kaifeng Jiang, assistant professors of management at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, and their colleagues, Berrin Erdogan and Talya N. Bauer of Portland State University, argue otherwise in an article titled "There are Lots of Big Fish in this Pond: The Role of Peer Overqualification on Task Significance, Perceived Fit, and Performance for Overqualified Employees," recently published by the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Hu and her colleagues spent six months conducting interviews and studies of 11 information technology companies in China. They discovered that "when individual employees feel that they are not the only 'big fish in the pond,' and when overqualification becomes a norm rather than exception within the group, they tend to have more favorable reactions toward their own overqualification status and perform better."

Hu believes that employers and managers should take these findings into account. "We believe that our research offers valuable implications for practice," she said. "Managers may benefit from understanding that as overqualification becomes normalized in the workplace, it exerts a more positive influence over such behaviors as job performance and citizenship.

"Furthermore, organizations should celebrate employees' qualifications when they are first brought on board and point out how these overqualified [employees](#) are in good company by highlighting that they will be working with a highly qualified group. Managers could also encourage more interactions among members to build team spirit, emphasizing the importance of benefiting others through one's work, and highlight the interpersonal compatibility within a group to promote the positive influence of overqualification on employee attitudes and behaviors."

More information: Jia Hu et al. There are lots of big fish in this pond: The role of peer overqualification on task significance, perceived fit, and performance for overqualified employees., *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0000008](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000008)

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