

Underemployment can lead to creativity and organizational commitment, according to study

September 20 2016



Credit: Oleksandr P from Pexels

Having underemployed workers can lead to two outcomes that benefit an organization—creativity and commitment to the

organization—according to a new study by management experts at Rice University, Chinese University of Hong Kong at Shenzhen and Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Statistics have shown that a significant proportion of workers worldwide are underemployed or working at jobs that are below their capacity. Researchers have estimated that [underemployment](#) ranges from 17 percent to two-thirds of the workforce in Asia, Europe and North America, according to the study.

"Our results have important implications for managers," said study co-author Jing Zhou, the Houston Endowment Professor of Management at Rice's Jones Graduate School of Business. "Managers should not assume that employees will always respond negatively to their perception of being underemployed. Our results suggest that managers need to be vigilant in detecting perceptions of underemployment among employees.

"When managers notice that their employees feel underemployed, they should support employees' efforts to proactively change the boundaries or formal descriptions of their work tasks, such as changing the sequencing of the tasks, increasing the number of tasks that they do or enlarging the scope of the tasks," she said. "Because the perception of underemployment may be experienced by many employees, managers should provide support to sustain positive outcomes in these situations."

The research, which will be published in the *Academy of Management Journal*, was based on a theoretical model that links underemployment to creativity and [organizational citizenship behavior](#), which is displayed by a person's voluntary commitment to an organization or company and positive behaviors that are not part of his or her job description. A three-waved, time-lagged survey of Chinese high school teachers and a field study of technical workers at an electronic equipment factory in China provided convergent support of the model.

In the first study, using data from 327 teachers and their immediate supervisors, the authors found support for their hypotheses that perceived underemployment—the employees' subjective experiences of underemployment—had a nonlinear relationship with task crafting. This means that task crafting happens to the greatest extent when perceived underemployment is at an intermediate level—when the employees perceived themselves to be slightly or moderately underemployed. When perceived underemployment is either too low or too high, task crafting diminishes.

The researchers also found that this relationship was moderated by [organizational identification](#), which refers to the extent to which an employee feels oneness with or belongingness to their organization and includes attributes of the organization in their self-definition. When the teachers' organizational identification was high, they engaged in more task crafting for the organization at intermediate levels of perceived underemployment. They also found that task crafting was positively related to creativity and organizational citizenship behavior.

In the second study, the simulation tasks for 297 technical workers provided convergent evidence that objective underemployment—tangible or observable instances of inadequate employment, such as overeducation and overexperience—indirectly influences task crafting through perceived underemployment. Consistent with the first study, perceived underemployment then had the nonlinear relationship with task crafting. Task crafting happened to the greatest extent when perceived underemployment was at an intermediate level.

The authors said that the nonlinear relationship between perceived underemployment and task crafting suggests there are limits to which positive reactions can be expected. "The positive side of the nonlinear relation implies that a low to intermediate degree of perceived underemployment may drive employees to craft their jobs actively in

ways that benefit the organization," they wrote. "However, the negative side of the nonlinear relation highlights that the large discrepancies between employees' capacity and job requirements are detrimental."

"Our findings of the moderating role of organizational identification suggest that practices that enhance organizational identification can help increase task-crafting efforts for [employees](#) perceiving themselves as underemployed," Zhou said. "In sum, our results encourage managers to proactively work toward achieving positive responses to underemployment. Another relevant implication is that recruitment managers should not turn away job applicants who are overqualified because such individuals, if managed appropriately, may bring creativity and organizational citizenship behavior to the organization."

Provided by Rice University

Citation: Underemployment can lead to creativity and organizational commitment, according to study (2016, September 20) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-09-underemployment-creativity-organizational-commitment.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.