

# Big fish in a small pond? Study says overqualified employees experience psychological strain

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Feel like you're a big fish in a small pond? If you're an employee who perceives you're overqualified for your position, chances are you're unsatisfied with your job, uncommitted to your organization and experience psychological strain, according to a study co-authored by a faculty member from Florida Atlantic University's College of Business.

Perceived overqualification - the belief that one has surplus skills compared to job requirements - can have negative implications for employees and employers alike, said Michael Harari, Ph.D., assistant professor in FAU's Department of Management Programs. Harari, together with fellow researchers Archana Manapragada and Chockalingam Viswesvaran of Florida International University, carried out a meta-analysis of perceived overqualification synthesizing 25 years of research to clarify disparate and conflicting findings in the literature. Their findings were recently published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

Perceived overqualification occurs when an employee is expecting a job that utilizes their qualifications but does not find themselves in such a position, leaving them feeling essentially deprived.

"That deprivation is what is theorized to result in these negative job attitudes," Harari said. "There's a discrepancy between expectation and reality. Because of this, you're angry, you're frustrated and as a result

you don't much care for the job that you have and feel unsatisfied."

Psychological strain can stem from employees who don't feel they're being rewarded for their efforts because there is an imbalance between their efforts and the reward structure of work.

"We invest effort at work and we expect rewards in return, such as esteem and career opportunities," Harari said. "And for an overqualified employee, that expectation has been violated. This is a stressful experience for employees, which leads to poor psychological wellbeing, such as negative emotions and psychological strain."

Employees who feel overqualified are also more likely to engage in deviant behaviors, Harari said. This might range from coming in late or leaving early to theft or bullying co-workers. The more overqualified an [employee](#) feels, the more likely they are to engage in counterproductive behaviors that impair the effective functioning of organizations, Harari said. Employees who were younger, overeducated and narcissistic tended to report higher levels of perceived overqualification.

"It seems to suggest that there is a need to take [jobs](#) below one's skill level in order to gain entrance into the workforce," Harari said. "We do see that, as people get older, they are less likely to report overqualification."

Provided by Florida Atlantic University

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