

THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF JOB SATISFACTION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED OVERQUALIFICATION, TURNOVER INTENTION AND JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG CALL CENTER EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine two hypothetical models: one in which job satisfaction acts as a mediator of the effects of overqualification on turnover intention and performance, and another in which job satisfaction acts as a mediator of the effects of overqualification on performance. Data were collected from 318 call center employees in Portugal. The relationships were tested using a multiple regression hierarchy with PROCESS. As hypothesized, job satisfaction mediates the relationship between overqualification and turnover intentions. It appears that overqualification alone does not influence intention to quit, but rather does so via satisfaction. Job satisfaction also mediates the relationship between overqualification and job performance. However, perceptions of non-growth appear to be associated with a decline in contextual performance. The effects of overqualification on turnover intentions and job performance of call center employees have not been previously studied. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap. Our study joins the small number of studies that analyze the mechanisms explaining the relationship between this mismatch between job demands and employees' perceived education, skills, experience, and work outcomes.

Keywords: Overqualification, Turnover Intention, Performance, Job Satisfaction, Call Center Employees.

INTRODUCTION

The general increase in unemployment, following the economic crisis, was accompanied by an increase in the unemployment rate of higher education graduates. The labor market does not seem to have the capacity to fully absorb the increase in the supply of qualified workers (OECD; 2019; Peiró et al., 2010), and many individuals are forced to accept jobs that require fewer qualifications and skills than they already have, so to avoid unemployment (Congregado et al., 2016). Although some studies report that call centers employ low-skilled workers who work in demanding, stressful, and robotic environments and appear to lack satisfactory career opportunities and compensation (e.g., Budhwar et al., 2009; Woydack & Lockwood, 2021), contact center companies have been the option for many graduates.

Currently, call centers are one of the most important services to gain a competitive advantage, because they are efficient units that provide immediate answers to the needs of customers. Call centers are new organizations that aim to provide technologies and services needed by institutions and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Originating in the 1960s with the Birmingham Press and Mail call centers in the United Kingdom, call centers have spread internationally beginning in the 1990s and have become a standard service for almost all businesses that interact with end users.

In Portugal, this sector has expanded considerably in recent years, and according to the most recent data provided by the Portuguese Association of Contact Centers (APCC, 2023) with a growth of 16% compared to the year, there are people working in the sector in Portugal, 59,159 thousand employees, of which 45% have higher education, although the educational qualifications for employment in this industry are basic or secondary education. In this sense, there is a likelihood that these contact center workers perceive themselves as being overqualified for the job.

Overqualification translates into a situation in which the individual has more skills, knowledge, abilities, and other qualifications that are not necessary or used in the function they perform (Erdogan et al., 2011) translating into negative effects. negative effects on employee behavior, including decline in productivity and high employee turnover (Zheng, & Wang, 2017),

As turnover intention is a major problem for companies that offer call centers (Abdullateef et al., 2014; Hassan et al., 2020), reducing employee turnover, maintaining productivity levels, and retaining talented employees becomes imperative (Budhwar et al., 2009). In Portugal, according to the Characterization and Benchmarking Study (APCC, 2023) the call center industry has a rate of 50%.

Thus, through the present study, and following the recommendations of McKee-Ryan and Harvey (2011) about the need for research on overqualification to involve the exploration of more complex models, including mediation, we propose to analyze the relationship between overqualification workers' perception of overqualification and intentions to leave and performance, including the analysis of the mediating role of job satisfaction as an explanatory mechanism of this relationship. The theoretical models are shown in Figure 1.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Perceived Overqualification and Job Satisfaction

From a subjective point of view, overqualification is the perception that an individual's skills exceed what is required by the job and the lack of opportunities to acquire or use new skills (Johnson et al., 2002; Maltarich et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2016). Subjective overqualification refers to individuals' perception of whether they are overqualified for their current jobs (Erdogan et al., 2020). The theory of relative deprivation holds that overqualified workers feel a discrepancy between the result they receive and the result they want/deserve, that is, better jobs, in which they can fully exploit their knowledge, skills and abilities (Erdoğan & Bauer, 2020), producing unpleasant thoughts and feelings about work (Edwards & Van Harrison, 1993; Feldman et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2015). The greater the sense of relative deprivation, the greater the sense of disappointment and frustration, resulting in worse health outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 1997) and increased negative attitudes at work, including disengagement and job dissatisfaction (Alfes, 2013; Alfes et al., 2016; Crosby, 1976; Feldman et al., 2002; Khakwani,

2016; Peiró et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2020). Typically, an overqualified worker has lower levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction (Peiró et al., 2010).

Perceived Overqualification and Turnover Intention

Turnover intention means that an employee is making plans to leave the hiring organization (Han, 2020; Lee et al., 2017). It covers the period between the worker's thoughts of leaving the job and the actual resignation (Fong & Mahfar, 2013; Momani, 2017). The literature has continually shown that turnover translates into costs for the organization in terms of recruiting and selecting and training new employees, or into a decline in performance and the quality of service provided to the customer (Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Porter & Rigby, 2021).

The literature shows that workers who perceive themselves as overqualified feel underutilized and wasted (Russell et al., 2016), see their work as meaningless (Allan et al., 2019), leading them to believe that they have more job opportunities (Maynard & Parfyonova, 2013), which causes turnover intention (Ahmad & Qadir, 2018; Saragih et al., 2019), and consequently leads them to look for a new job where they can use their skills. It is also possible that the PWP situation prevents civil servants from meeting their basic needs, which are important factors influencing turnover intention (Mussag-ulova & Demircioglu, 2022). The results of the meta-analysis also suggested that overqualification was positively correlated with turnover intention (Harari et al., 2017).

Perceived Overqualification and Job Performance

Among the different approaches to job performance, almost all are unanimous in defending that individual work performance should be perceived not only as the results obtained through an action, but also as the behaviors that lead to them, presenting it as a construct multidimensional (Campbell, 2012; Demerouti et al., 2014; Paula & Queiroga, 2015). Koopmans et al. (2014) argue that individual work performance consists of three dimensions that complement each other: task performance, related to competence and knowledge that facilitates its performance effectively and with quality; contextual performance, related to the proactivity of the worker, which goes beyond what is asked of him and which contributes to the improvement of the organizational, social and psychological environment of the company (extra-mile) and; finally, the counterproductive behaviors, which are those that are invoked in order to harm the organization.

Equity motivation theory (Adams, 1965) proposes that overqualified individuals may experience a hostile and frustrating situation because they perceive a lower input-output ratio compared to others and, as a result, they may react by performing at a lower level.

In turn, the theory of relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976) postulates that employees are disappointed if there is an inconsistency between expectation and reality or a discrepancy between what they feel they deserve and what they receive and, consequently, overqualified feel frustrated, which results in adverse reactions to work which can lead to poor performance within the organization.

The literature has been reporting an inverse association between overqualification and job performance (Van Dijk et al., 2020; Fine & Nevo, 2008; Willis et al., 2019). According to Lee et al. (2021), perceived overqualification has a negative relationship with attitudes at work, including organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and a positive relationship with counterproductive behaviors at work. Studies carried out by Kaufman (1974) and by Berlew &

Hall (1966) prove that less challenging tasks are negatively related to the performance of the collaborator go further, stating that overqualified workers are considered high risk for the company due to their poor performance.

Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention

Determining job satisfaction is subjective, but it typically reflects how employees feel about their job and the characteristics of their work (Benedetti et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). According to Alsaad et al., (2023), job satisfaction is an evaluation that indicates a person's feelings of pleasure or annoyance and their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction at work. Existing research on job satisfaction, while differing in terms of the content of its focus, similarly examines conditions, treatment, and relationships in the workplace (Bianchi et al., 2023).

Previous research (e.g., Chavadi et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2017; Pepe, 2010; Ravari et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2017; Yu et al. 2020) has shown that job satisfaction affects employees' willingness to leave or stay in the organization. In other words, if employees are dissatisfied with their work, they are more likely to intend to leave (Long & Thean, 2011; Ravari et al., 2012).

Job Satisfaction and Job Performance

According to Liu et al., (2015) employees with a high level of job satisfaction will have a positive attitude towards work, while employees with a low level of job satisfaction will have a negative attitude towards work. Outcomes of job satisfaction as reported in the literature include its effect on employee productivity (Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007) and employee performance (Pugno, 2009; Ramli, 2018), which means that employee productivity and performance can be enhanced based on employee job satisfaction (Sabuhari et al., 2020).

Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

The mediating role of job satisfaction has been confirmed in various research models.

Research has shown that job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between different variables, namely: stress and turnover intention (Liu et al., 2019; Ning et al, 2023), work-family conflict and anxiety (Zhao et al., 2023), customer incivility in employee work effort and intention to quit (Doğantekin et al., 2023), employee loyalty in work performance (Ali Ateeq et al., 2023) and; self-efficacy, organizational commitment and workload (Cayupe et al., 2023).

METHOD

Participants

A total of 318 call center workers from two commercial services in telecommunications companies operating in Portugal, between the ages of 19 and 68 years, with an average age of 34 years, 27.7% (n=88) men and 71.7% (n=228) women, participated in the study. A total of 89% of respondents had a secondary education or a degree (52.8% and 36.2%, respectively). Twenty-three of the participants had less than one year of service, 29.6% had worked for the company for 1 to 3 years, 21.1% had worked for the company for 4 to 6 years, 11.3% had worked for the company for 7 to 9 years, and the remaining 15.1% had worked for the company for more than 10 years. Finally, 77.4% of respondents were assistants, 12.3% were supervisors or held a managerial position, and 10.4% were back-office assistants.

Measures and Procedures

A cross-sectional study using an anonymous online survey was conducted. Contact center staff in Portugal were initially invited to participate in our study. The link to the website was sent by email or through the Microsoft Teams platform to professionals or companies with contact centers that agreed to participate in this study. The announcement at the beginning of the survey indicated that all responses would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. Respondents were solicited to voluntarily participate in the survey.

Measures used and reviewed in previous literature were applied to this survey. Correct translation was confirmed by translation and back translation from English to Portuguese (Brislin, 1986). All measures were rated using a five-point Likert scale according to context (1 = disagree at all / very dissatisfied / never, 5 = agree completely / very satisfied / always).

Perceived overqualification was measured using the Perceived overqualification scale (Johnson et al., 2002). The scale consists of 10 items organized into dimensions: perceived mismatch (PM) (e.g., "I master all or almost all the tasks in my job") and perceived no-growth or no-growth (PN-G) (e.g., "My job often provides me with new challenges"). In the scale translated into Portuguese, the Cronbach's alpha values were 0.698 and 0.812 for the PM and PN-G dimensions, respectively.

Job satisfaction was measured using the Job Satisfaction Scale (Warr et al., 1979). This scale consists of fifteen items and has a factor structure consisting of one factor. The internal consistency presented by this scale in this study is adequate, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.918.

Individual Work Performance was measured using the Individual Work Performance measurement scale (Koopmans et al., 2014). This scale measures behaviors or actions that are relevant to the organization's objectives. It consists of 18 items organized into three dimensions: Task Performance (TP) (e.g., "I was able to plan my work in order to finish it on time"), Contextual Performance (CP) (e.g., "When I finished my tasks, I started new ones on my own initiative"), and Counterproductive Behaviors (CB) (e.g., "I complain about problems that are not important"). In this study the Cronbach's alpha values were 0.830; 0.843 and 0.716. for the TP, CP, and CB dimensions, respectively.

Turnover intention was measured using the Organizational Exit Intentions Scale (Bártolo-Ribeiro, 2018), made up of eight items and with a factor structure consisting of one factor. The internal consistency presented by this scale in this study is adequate, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.931.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis SPSS 26.0 and SPSS PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) were used to enter and analyze the data in this study. SPSS 26.0 was used for descriptive statistics, difference analysis, reliability testing, and correlation analysis. Additionally, PROCESS Macro v 2.16.3 was used to test the mediation model for SPSS 26.0 with 5000 bootstrap samples. We used Model 4 to test the mediating role of job satisfaction in the association between perceived overqualification and turnover intention and in the association between perceived overqualification and performance, which have been commonly used by academic researchers in the past to test mediation relationships. All p-values less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) were considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables in this study. As expected, the results showed that overqualification was significantly negatively related to job satisfaction ($r = -0.304, p < 0.01$; $r = -0.631, p < 0.01$) and significantly positively related to Turnover Intention ($r = 0.248, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.547, p < 0.01$). Job satisfaction was significantly negatively related to Turnover Intention ($r = -0.647, p < 0.01$) and counterproductive behaviors ($r = -0.345, p < 0.01$) and significantly positively related to task and context performance ($r = 0.343, p < 0.01$; $r = 0.227, p < 0.01$). In addition, there is a significant relationship between overqualification and all dimensions of job performance except task performance ($r = 0.027, p > 0.05$).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived mismatch	3.45	0.88						
2. Perceived Non-Growth	2.87	0.96	0.215**					
3. Job Satisfaction	3.40	0.77	-0.304**	-0.631**				
4. Task Performance	3.68	0.77	0.027	-0.163**	0.343**			
5. Contextual Performance	2.97	0.86	0.128*	-0.344**	0.227**	0.460**		
6. Counterproductive Behaviors	1.57	0.60	0.182**	0.230**	-0.345**	-0.202**	-0.090	
7. Turnover intention	2.38	1.05	0.248**	0.547**	-0.647**	-0.289**	-0.216**	0.378**

Difference Analysis Results

Before testing the research model/hypotheses, difference analyses were conducted to know whether different dimensions in study differ in demographic characteristics such as gender.

Group comparison analysis revealed that compared to women, men were more prone to feeling overqualified and lacking growth opportunities ($t = 2.046; p = 0.042$), more prone to counterproductive behavior ($t = 4.106; p = 0.001$), and more prone to wanting to leave the organization ($t = 2.627; p = 0.009$) Table 2 & 3.

Effect	B	se	t	p
PM → JS	-0.2647	0.0467	-5.6733	0.0000
JS → TI	-0.8633	0.0616	-14.0132	.000
PM → TI	0.0668	0.0536	1.2453	.2140

PN-G → JS	-0.5070	0.0351	-14.4648	0.0000
JS → TI	-0.6876	0.0737	-9.3248	0.0000
PN-G → TI	0.2533	0.0592	4.2759	0.0000

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF PROCESS MODEL 4 WITH WORK PERFORMANCE AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE (MODEL 2)

Effect	B	se	t	p
PM → JS	-0.2647	0.0467	-5.6733	0.0000
JS → TP	0.3864	0.0548	7.0483	0.0000
PM → TP	0.1254	0.0477	2.6281	0.0090
PN-G → JS	-0.5070	0.0351	-14.4648	0.0000
JS → TP	0.3990	0.0679	5.8782	0.0000
PN-G → TP	.0718	0.0545	1.3168	0.1889
PM → JS	-0.2647	0.0467	-5.6733	0.0000
JS → TC	0.3256	0.0625	5.2067	0.0000
PM → TC	0.2104	0.0544	3.8657	0.0001
PN-G → JS	-0.5070	0.0351	-14.04648	0.0000
JS → TC	0.0183	0.0758	0.2412	0.8096
PN-G → TC	-0.2976	0.0609	-4.8885	0.0000
PM → JS	-0.2647	0.0467	-5.6733	0.0000
JS → CC	-0.2492	0.0432	-5.7681	0.0000
PM → CC	0.0577	0.0376	1.5342	0.1260
PN-G → JS	-0.5070	0.0351	-14.04648	0.0000
JS → CC	-0.2589	0.0533	-4.8610	0.0000
PN-G → CC	0.0134	0.0428	0.3123	0.7550

Third, our analysis showed that the effect of overqualification PM on task performance ($\beta = 0.1254, p < 0.01$), task context ($\beta = 0.2104, p < 0.01$) was also positively significant, and the effect of overqualification PN-G on task performance ($\beta = -0.2976, p < 0.01$) was negatively significant and this hypothesis 3 is partial supported.

As shown in Table 4, the indirect effect of job satisfaction was significant for all relations except IC de 95% PN-G – JS- CP [-0.086, 0.69] which contains zero, i.e., $p > 0.05$. Overall, H6 was supported and H7 was partial supported through 5000 bootstrap samples to determine the confidence intervals (CIs) for all significance tests (Cahyadi et al., 2021).

TABLE 4
INDIRECT EFFECTS

Variables	Indirect effects	Effect	BSE	IC de 95%	
				BootLLCI	BootULCI
Model 1	PM → JS → TI	0.229*	0.047	0.139	0.324
	PN-G → JS → TI	0.349*	0.046	0.259	0.442
Model 2	PM → JS → TP	-0.102*	0.026	-0.155	-0.0563
	PM → JS → CP	-0.086*	0.025	-0.139	-0.044
	PM → JS → CB	0.066*	0.019	0.033	0.106
	PN-G → JS → TP	-0.202*	0.037	-0.275	-0.131
	PN-G → JS → CP	-0.009*	0.039	-0.086	0.069

	PN-G → JS → CB	0.131*	0.033	0.069	0.199
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DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research was to test a model that postulates that perceived overqualification is related to turnover intention in a contact center. In addition, we intended to study an unexplored mediating role of job satisfaction in explaining the relationship between perceived overqualification and turnover intentions. In addition, as a second theoretical model, we also intended to analyze the influence of overqualification on perceived performance, analyzing the mediating effect of job satisfaction. The results from a sample of contact center workers partially supported the hypothetical models, leading to various implications for valuing the sector and reducing the rates of voluntary departures from contact center companies.

Regarding the first model, there was total mediation regarding the Perceived Maladjustment dimension, and partial mediation regarding the perceived non-growth dimension. It can be concluded that, unlike previous studies which state that overqualification is related to intentions to leave (e.g., Harari et al., 2017; Mussag-ulova & Demircioglu, 2022), in our study overqualification does not affect the intention to leave, but rather through satisfaction. We analyzed the two dimensions of overqualification, which allowed us to conclude that they have a cause-effect on the satisfaction variable, which in turn affects the intention to leave variable. We found that as overqualification increases, satisfaction decreases, which in turn increases the intention to leave the organization. The hypotheses were corroborated, with full mediation in H6.1 and partial mediation in H6.2, with the strongest path being confirmed as mediation.

Regarding the second model, contrary to the literature (e.g., Van Dijk et al., 2020; Fine & Nevo, 2008; Willis et al., 2019), there was a positive effect of overqualification Perceived Maladjustment on task performance, task context. We believe this may be because overqualified professionals are more creative and innovative and are more willing to take on challenges (Brooks & Gray, 2013). Our results also corroborate previous findings that job performance can be enhanced based on employee job satisfaction (Sabuhari et al., 2020).

Regarding the mediation effect, there were two overall mediations related to the first dimension of overqualification (perceived mismatch) and the task and context performance dimensions (H7.1; H7.2); further related to the first dimension of overqualification, we have one overall mediation related to counterproductive behaviors (H7.3); and two more overall mediations related to the dimension of perception of non-growth and task performance and counterproductive behaviors (H7.4; H7.6). All hypotheses were confirmed except for H7.5, where there is a direct effect, i.e., the fact that perception of non-growth decreases contextual performance (Van Dijk et al., 2020; Fine & Nevo, 2008; Lee et al. 2021; Willis et al., 2019). This could mean that although employees feel that there are no opportunities for career advancement, they continue to strive to achieve that goal (Brooks & Gray, 2013). All hypotheses showed that as overqualification increases, satisfaction decreases (Alfes, 2013; Alfes et al., 2016; Crosby, 1976; Feldman et al., 2002; Khakwani, 2016; Peiró et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2020), which is consistent with the first research model. It was found that as satisfaction decreases, perceptions of performing counterproductive behaviors increase. In turn, for the other performance dimensions, as satisfaction increases, contextual performance and task performance also increase. That is, as in the first model, the overqualification variable does not affect performance

directly, but rather through satisfaction, except for the contextual performance dimension, where overqualification is sufficient to decrease it.

Implications

The present findings also have some practical implications. First, the results suggest that overqualification does not directly affect the intention to leave, but rather through the satisfaction variable. Considering these results, it is necessary for organizations, more specifically around human resource management, to promote and develop new practices that improve the satisfaction of contact center workers to mitigate the volume of voluntary departures. Contrary to what was first thought, overqualification turns out not to carry the weight of influencing the departure of employees, because if they have other types of associated rewards that go against their satisfaction, it is not because they are overqualified that will want to leave the organization. That said, it would be important to carry out a group or individual diagnosis, to identify the main reasons why employees feel dissatisfied and to articulate solutions to provide greater satisfaction, from talent management solutions and career progression; remuneration rewards; between others. In this sense, performance is also influenced by employee satisfaction, and an employee with poor performance is not aligned with the organization, in its strategic sense, not being effective in meeting the organizational objectives and does not contribute to the organization's competitiveness (Rego et al., 2015). Even if the company develops actions to improve performance, through training, for example, this may not be enough, as the employee, being dissatisfied with other aspects of his work, will maintain his poor performance, it will be necessary to create tools that promote engagement of the collaborator in the accomplishment of the objectives. In turn, performance evaluations will certainly be negative, which may contribute to greater dissatisfaction on the part of the employee, as they often contribute to the evolution and management of the career within the company. Thus, and once again, the question arises of identifying the reasons that lead to employee dissatisfaction, such as: salary; physical workspace; relationships with management or colleagues; etc... If the dissatisfaction is related to monetary values, the adoption of an incentive policy related to the performance evaluation score could be a good solution to improve both aspects. (Rego et al., 2015). In this way, as ways of identifying existing reasons for dissatisfaction and starting to study ways to combat them, various measures can be taken, such as: satisfaction surveys, which may or may not be anonymous, so that employees do not feel "uncomfortable" in sharing their opinions; group meetings in which everyone can expose their ideas, in order to feel that they are heard and, if possible, put into practice; create platforms that allow employees to give ideas on certain topics; and also, not least, conducting exit interviews, only in this way can the organization identify what went wrong and improve in the future.

Limitations e Future Studies

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, the sample consisted of 318 call center workers from two companies and a single country (Portugal), and all the workers were employed in commercial services in telecommunications, which may limit the generalizability of these results. For future studies, it would be important to expand both the number of participants in the sample and the number of sectors where data is collected (e.g., banking; health; gas and energy; insurance; among others).

Second, all variables were measured from the same source in a single survey. Although we believe that this design has not threatened our results too much, in the future it is suggested to introduce a time lag between the measurement of the perception of overqualification, satisfaction, turnover intentions and performance.

Finally, our design was correlational and cross-sectional and, therefore, causality cannot be inferred from the results. Future studies with a longitudinal design should be carried out to better understand the effects of perceived overqualification on employee turnover intentions and performance.

CONCLUSION

The proportion of people working in contact centers with qualifications above the educational requirements for employment in the contact center industry appears to be increasingly common, making them more likely to feel overqualified. Although overqualification may seem like a problem at first glance, it can also bring with it positive potential that should not be underestimated. Our results show that hiring workers who feel overqualified does not seem to bring disadvantages when their job satisfaction is considered. Job satisfaction seems to be able to transform overqualification into added value for the individual and the company, creating a positive cycle of growth and mutual success.

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