

A Study on the Effect of Newcomer's Implicit Followership on Perceived Overqualification

Wei Zhang*

School of Management, Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan, Guangdong, China

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: This study primarily investigates the mechanism by which implicit followership among newcomer's perceived overqualification. Grounded in identity theory and resource conservation theory, it collected data via questionnaires from 429 new employees with less than three years of tenure, employing SPSS and AMOS software for empirical analysis. Focusing on the positive and negative dimensions of implicit followership, the research systematically examined their relationship with perceived overqualification. Results indicate that positive implicit followership exhibits a significant negative correlation with newcomers' perceived overqualification, while negative implicit followership shows a significant positive correlation with perceived overqualification. This study expands the application scope of followership theory, providing empirical evidence and management insights for organizations to guide newcomer in developing positive implicit followership cognition and reducing perceived overqualification.

Keywords: Positive Implicit Followership; Negative Implicit Followership; Perceived Overqualification

1. Introduction

In today's fiercely competitive workplace environment, the integration and growth of new employees represent a critical focus for organizational development. Transitioning from academia to the professional sphere, new hires face the challenge of shifting from student to professional roles while adapting to entirely new work environments, responsibilities, and interpersonal dynamics. Implicit followership, as a key area within workplace cognition research, holds significant importance for understanding employee behavior and

psychology. Implicit followership refers to the schemas and assumptions individuals hold regarding the traits and behaviors expected of followers[1]. Identity theory offers a fresh perspective on new employees' adaptation within organizations, focusing on how individuals construct their cognitive and emotional attachment to "who they are" within specific groups and organizations through the mechanism of "self-categorization"[2].

The phenomenon of perceived overqualification, a common psychological experience among new employees, is gaining increasing attention. Perceived Overqualification is defined as an individual's perception that their knowledge, skills, educational background, work experience, and job competencies exceed the normal requirements of their position[3]. New employees often possess advanced degrees and specialized expertise, yet may feel their abilities are underutilized in practice due to overly simple tasks or unreasonable task allocation. Data from major domestic online recruitment platforms reveal that approximately half of job seekers possess qualifications exceeding the requirements of the positions they apply for. This disparity may lead to reduced job satisfaction and decreased work engagement among new hires, potentially impacting their career planning and long-term development. Research indicates that perceived overqualification positively influences both employee innovation behavior and online idling behavior[4].

According to resource conservation theory, certain individual characteristics that help individuals resist stress are considered resources. In fact, positive implicit followership represents an individual's positive cognitive formation regarding the follower role and their positive belief in this role[5]. This positive belief and positive expectations of oneself as a follower help employees resist stress and can be

regarded as one of the resources individuals possess. This study aims to delve into the specific mechanisms through which new employees' implicit followership influences their perceived overqualification, providing theoretical foundations and practical guidance for corporate management and new employee development.

2. Theoretical Hypothesis

Regarding the antecedent factors influencing perceived overqualification, research indicates that both job-related factors[6] and individual factors[7] impact perceived overqualification. At the individual level, research indicates that task orientation is significantly correlated with perceived overqualification. Task-oriented employees persistently engage with their work, maintaining diligence even when performing simple tasks. Such individuals value the work process itself and do not experience frustration when job demands fall below their qualifications. Additionally, employees with high achievement needs tend to experience lower overqualification. Achievement need is a personality trait that governs individual perceptions and behaviors, driving individuals to fully commit to their work and strive to achieve goals. Even when faced with obstacles, they actively seek ways to adapt and resolve problems[7].

This study posits that positive implicit followership negatively impacts perceived overqualification, while negative implicit followership positively influences perceived overqualification. The reasons are as follows:

First, the dimension of positive implicit followership encompasses three components: diligence, good citizenship, and loyalty[1]. When new employees possess a cognitive disposition toward positive implicit followership, this disposition does not emerge only upon becoming followers. Research indicates that this cognitive framework is internalized through accumulated experience during their development. Consequently, employees with positive implicit followership typically exhibit diligence, efficiency, passion, and extroverted friendliness[8]. Consequently, such employees accumulate relatively abundant resources, granting them greater career choices and making them less likely to accept positions they perceive as beneath their qualifications[9]. Conversely, employees with negative implicit

followership tend to possess weaker work capabilities and exhibit more stubborn personalities. In comparison, their resource accumulation is relatively scarce, making it difficult to exchange existing resources for more valuable ones. Consequently, they face fewer choices during job searches and are more likely to enter organizations where they experience perceived overqualification.

Secondly, employees with positive implicit followership typically exhibit superior followership behaviors[8]. Such behaviors manifest as setting personal work goals, overcoming obstacles, and resolving workplace issues. These employees also demonstrate meticulous attention to detail in executing leadership assignments[10]. Consequently, leaders tend to favor employees who embody positive implicit followership. Leaders typically possess unique resource reserves. Through their own efforts and diligence, employees gain exposure to more challenging tasks, thereby acquiring and accumulating both intangible and tangible resources during this process. Additionally, leaders provide them with greater supportive resources. Consequently, employees with positive implicit followership may experience lower perceived overqualification in their work. In contrast, individuals with passive implicit followership rarely seek work-related knowledge proactively. Moreover, such employees show little interest in additional training or experience at work. These behavioral patterns indicate that passive implicit followers are unwilling to leverage their own resources to acquire or exchange more valuable resources. Furthermore, they often remain in a state of apathy, lacking motivation and feeling unengaged or idle. Research indicates that a tendency toward boredom is associated with perceived overqualification[11]. When individuals experience boredom, it often signifies a lack of meaningful resource exchange with their environment. Moreover, bored individuals tend to attribute this boredom to overqualification rather than their own inherent traits. In summary, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Positive implicit followership is negatively correlated with perceived overqualification.

H2: Negative implicit followership is positively correlated with perceived overqualification.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Sample

The primary subjects of this study are new employees with less than three years of tenure at their companies. In designing the basic demographic questions, this research drew upon authoritative literature analyzing individual factors of new employees. A total of seven questions were developed, covering gender, age, educational background, company industry, company type, work hours, and whether this is their first full-time position. To alleviate participants' concerns about privacy disclosure, the questionnaire explicitly stated at the beginning that all information collected would be used solely for academic research and that personal details would never be disclosed externally. Additionally, the anonymous format reduced the likelihood of respondents

withholding truthful answers due to privacy concerns.

To empirically test the aforementioned new employee research model, this study designed a survey questionnaire and commissioned Wenshuoxing to conduct an online survey. The online survey primarily involved placing the questionnaire on the Wenjuanxing website (a relatively professional domestic online survey platform) and commissioning Wenjuanxing to conduct the online survey among newly hired employees meeting the criteria. Overall, the survey covered a broad range of respondents with a substantial sample size, ensuring the representativeness of the research subjects. After a two-month distribution period, 429 valid questionnaires were collected. The specific sample distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

Survey Content	Category	Frequency	Effective Percentage
Gender	Male	180	42
	Female	249	58
Education	College diploma or below	94	21.9
	Bachelor's degree	285	66.4
	Master's degree or above	50	11.7
Occupation Public institution	3 months or less	28	6.5
	4 months to under 1 year	78	18.2
	1 year to under 3 years	323	63.2
Occupation	Public institution	52	12.1
	State-Owned Enterprise	129	30.1
	Foreign-Invested Joint Venture	39	9.1
	Private Enterprise	198	46.2
	Other	20	4.7
First Full-Time Job	Yes	367	85.5
	No	62	14.5

As shown in the table 1, women account for 27.2%. Regarding educational attainment, the largest group holds associate or bachelor's degrees, representing 93.2%. A total of 367 respondents were entering their first full-time position, constituting 85.5%, while 62 new hires were recruited from other companies to join their current employer.

3.2 Research Tools

The implicit followership scale used in this study draws upon the scale developed by Sy [1], encompassing two dimensions: positive implicit follow-through and negative implicit follow-through. The overqualification scale adopts the established measure developed by Maynard et al.[12], assessing employees' perceived

overqualification across dimensions including education, knowledge, experience, and competence.

3.3 Reliability and Validity Testing of the Scale

3.3.1 Content validity

To assess the appropriateness of the measurement scope for the sample content, this study conducted a literature review and summarized empirical questionnaires with identical or similar dimensions based on relevant prior theories. This process established the measurement questionnaire for each dimension. Following the completion of the initial draft, the questionnaire underwent evaluation and revision by relevant experts and

scholars. Consequently, the questionnaire developed in this study possesses a high degree of content validity.

3.3.2 Reliability and convergent validity

Table 2 presents a summary of standardized factor loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Fornell and Larcker[13] recommended three metrics to assess the convergent validity of measurement items. The first is a measure of item reliability, the second involves calculating the composite reliability (CR) of the construct, and the final step analyzes the average variance extracted (AVE). Within a structure, composite reliability

implies internal reliability for each indicator, with items below the threshold level being removed. Table 2 shows that standardized factor loadings for items ranged from 0.635 to 0.883, indicating all items fall within a reasonable range and possess convergent validity. All CR values ranged from 0.921 to 0.930, exceeding the 0.6 threshold recommended by Fornell and Larcker[13], indicating internal consistency across all constructs. Finally, all AVEs ranged from 0.593 to 0.623, exceeding the 0.5 threshold suggested by Fornell and Larcker[13]. All constructs demonstrated sufficient convergent validity

Table 2. Model Measurement Results

Construct	Item	Factor loading	CR	AVE
PIF	PIF 01	0.883	0.930	0.598
	PIF 02	0.790		
	PIF 03	0.686		
	PIF 04	0.644		
	PIF 05	0.809		
	PIF 06	0.804		
	PIF 07	0.699		
	PIF 08	0.802		
	PIF 09	0.814		
NIF	NIF 01	0.635	0.921	0.593
	NIF 02	0.811		
	NIF 03	0.766		
	NIF 04	0.796		
	NIF 05	0.771		
	NIF 06	0.751		
	NIF 07	0.879		
	NIF 08	0.730		
POQ	POQ 01	0.766	0.930	0.623
	POQ 02	0.786		
	POQ 03	0.815		
	POQ 04	0.805		
	POQ 05	0.807		
	POQ 06	0.803		
	POQ 07	0.770		
	POQ 08	0.761		

Note: PIF = Positive Implicit Followership; NIF = Negative Implicit Followership; POQ=Perceived Overqualification

3.3.3 Distinctive validity

Comparing the square root of the AVE for a given construct with its correlations to other constructs constitutes discriminant validity[13]. If the square root of an AVE for a structure is higher than the corresponding non-diagonal elements in the row and column, these indicators correlate more strongly with the structure than others. As shown in Table 3, bold numbers along the diagonal represent the square

root of AVEs. Since all diagonal numbers exceed their non-diagonal counterparts, the discriminant validity of all structures meets the requirement.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Results

Construct	AVE	POQ	NIF	PIF
POQ	0.623	0.789		
NIF	0.593	0.571	0.770	
PIF	0.598	-0.273	-0.247	0.773

Note: Bold diagonal text represents the square root of the AVE for each dimension, while the lower triangles denote the squared Pearson correlation coefficients between dimensions.

3.3.4 Hypothesis testing

Path coefficient tests and model predictive power estimates were conducted for the structural model to empirically examine the

proposed research hypotheses. Table 4 presents the path coefficient analysis used to validate causal relationships among variables. Positive implicit followership ($P=0.009<0.05$) significantly influenced perceived overqualification, while negative implicit followership ($P<0.001$) significantly impacted perceived overqualification. Thus, Hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported.

Table 4. Path Analysis

DV	IV	Unstd	S.E.	Unstd./S.E.	p-value	Std.	R ²
POQ	PIF	-0.461	0.175	-2.626	0.009	-0.147	0.382
	NIF	0.954	0.136	7.036	0.000	0.566	

Note: PIF = Positive Implicit Followership; NIF = Negative Implicit Followership; POQ=Perceived Overqualification

4. Research Findings and Outlook

This study utilized data from 429 questionnaire responses to examine the impact of new employees' implicit followership on perceived of overqualification. The findings reveal that positive implicit followership among new employees significantly reduces perceived of overqualification, while negative implicit followership significantly increases such feelings. New employees who develop positive implicit followership may accumulate greater resources during their job search, enabling them to select employers where perceived of overqualification is unlikely to occur. Employees with positive implicit followership are guided by a proactive mindset, enabling them to challenge themselves, continuously learn, and engage in more demanding tasks. They actively seek solutions to workplace problems. Thus, positive implicit followership serves as an internal resource that motivates new employees to push their limits, making it difficult for them to perceive themselves as overqualified. Conversely, employees with passive implicit followership often find themselves limited to roles with higher skill mismatch. Such individuals typically struggle to identify meaningful tasks, remain in a passive state, and lack effective communication with colleagues. Consequently, they experience heightened feelings of skill mismatch in environments where they have little to do or face no challenges.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by:
Guangdong Provincial Philosophy and Social Sciences Planning Discipline Joint

Development Project (No. GD23XGL051);
Guangdong University of Science and Technology Institutional Teaching Reform Project (No. GKZLGC2023167);
Guangdong University of Science and Technology Institutional Research Projects (2023KYZDW-2; GKY-2025KYZDW-3).

References

- [1] Sy, T. What do you think of followers? Examining the content, structure, and consequences of implicit followership theories. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 2010, 113(2): 73-84.
- [2] Song, J. Y. Identity theory facilitating new employees' rapid integration. *Human Resources*, 2025, (21): 103-105.
- [3] Mei, M., Liao, S. J., Yang, F., et al. Leadership reward omission, organizational self-esteem, and work withdrawal behavior: The moderating effect of perceived overqualification. *Management Review*, 2025, 37(10): 174-184.
- [4] Cao, Z. T., Liang, Q. Y. The influence mechanism of perceived overqualification on employees' approach-avoidance behaviors. *Leadership Science*, 2025, (05): 99-109.
- [5] Hoption, C., Han, J. M. "Mommy and me": Raising implicit followership theories. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 2021, 53(2): 117-127.
- [6] Li, Y. Job autonomy, perceived overqualification, and deviant innovation: The moderating role of trust asymmetry. *Business Management Journal*, 2025, (05): 157-164.
- [7] Zhao, H. C. The impact of employees' need

- for achievement on perceived overqualification: A moderated chain mediation model. *Journal of Hebei University of Economics and Business (Comprehensive Edition)*, 2021, 21(3): 88-96.
- [8] Luo, J. L., Yan, J. Q., Jia, J. F. The influence of employees' positive followership traits on followership behavior from the perspective of social construction. *Chinese Journal of Management*, 2018, (7): 971-979.
- [9] Guerrero, L., Hatala, J. Antecedents of perceived overqualification: A three-wave study. *Career Development International*, 2015, 20(4): 409-423.
- [10] Zhou, W. J., Song, J. W., Li, H. L. The connotation, structure, and measurement of followership in the Chinese context. *Chinese Journal of Management*, 2015, (3): 355-363.
- [11] Watt, J. D., Hargis, M. B. Boredom proneness: Its relationship with subjective underemployment, perceived organizational support, and job performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 2010, 25(1): 163-174.
- [12] Maynard, D. C., Joseph, T. A., Maynard, A. M. Underemployment, job attitudes, and turnover intentions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 2006, 27(4): 509-536.
- [13] Fornell, C., Larcker, D. F. Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 1981, 18(1): 39-50.