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Article

Perceived Overqualification, Constructive Deviant Behaviour and Intergenerational Differences: Evidence from China

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Abstract: **Aim:** This study aimed to investigate the relationship between employees perceived overqualification, transformational leadership, constructive deviant behaviour, and the generational differences in their relationships. **Methods:** This study collected data from 525 employees using a two-wave data collection design with a month gap between each round. Moreover, we employed least squares stepwise regression to analyze the data. **Results:** The findings asserted that perceived overqualification positively affects constructive deviant behaviour, and transformational leadership strengthened the effect of perceived overqualification on positive toward constructive deviant behaviour. Furthermore, the effect of perceived overqualification on constructive deviant behaviour is strongest among individuals born in the 1980s, followed by those born in the 1990s, and the moderating effect of TL is strongest among individuals born in the 1980s, and not significant among those born in the 1990s. Implications, limitations, and future directions of the present study are discussed. **Discussion:** The study suggests that when employees feel overqualified, they are more likely to engage in constructive deviant behavior, meaning those who perceive themselves as having excessive qualifications are more willing to act against organizational rules if it benefits the organization. In this process, transformational leadership enhances this positive effect. However, the impact of feeling overqualified on constructive deviance and the moderating role of transformational leadership differ among generations of employees. Therefore, fostering transformational leadership and accurately recognizing the overqualification feelings of different generational employees can help organizations effectively manage their overqualified talent pool, increasing employee satisfaction and productivity.

Keywords: perceived overqualification; constructive deviant behaviour; transformational leadership; intergenerational differences

Introduction

Perceived Overqualification (POQ) is a type of underemployment and a global labor force phenomenon.[1] In recent years, as society continues to attach greater importance to education, the phenomenon of 'high intelligence but low employment, high ability but low employment, and high talent but low employment' has become a common phenomenon in the job market. According to a survey conducted by Globe Press, approximately 47% of employees worldwide feel that their abilities exceed the requirements of their jobs, while in China, about 84% of employees feel "overqualified" for their positions. As a form of "underemployment", POQ reflects the disparity between actual job positions and desired employment (Li, 2020), indicating that individuals possess education levels, work experience, skills, or abilities that surpass the demands of their jobs.[2–5] Indeed, POQ has become a global phenomenon.[6] In light of this, understanding the psychological experience of working in a job for which one is overqualified has become a central concern in the literature.[7] Despite the negative effects of POQ on overqualified employees attitudes, the relationship with employees behaviors has been equivocal. POQ can lead employees to engage in negative behaviors such as reduced job involvement and increased turnover intentions.[7] Conversely, it may also induce positive work behaviors such as enhanced innovation, instigation of deviant innovation, and reduced

professional identity threat. [8] Therefore, whether the POQ is more than enough or too little is an issue that is more worthy of in-depth analysis for both theoretical research and practical application.

Currently, research on POQ is mainly based on three theories: Person-environment fit theory, relative deprivation theory, and equity theory. The first two theories mostly study the negative impact of POQ on employee' behavior, whereas the equity theory focuses more on the positive impact. However, the paradox of POQ has not been resolved. CDB are employees initiated behaviours. Therefore, we suggested that Parker's classic employee behavior model—the model of proactive motivation —can offer new insights into resolving the POQ paradox.

Another undeniable fact is that those born in the 1990s, exhibit prominent traits such as strong individuality, assertiveness, reluctance to yield easily, and reduced tolerance in the 21st-century labor market. When faced with situations of being underutilized, they are more prone to expressing dissent, dissatisfaction, offering suggestions, and engaging in behaviors that can either harm or contribute to the development of the enterprise. Research has found employees' CDB has become an important way for organizations to break through the bottleneck of change and realize transformation and upgrading.[9] However, not all employees engage in CDB. According to the model of proactive motivation and social exchange theory, employees only engage in CDB when they have strong motivational states and the capability to do so, and their behavior is influenced by leadership styles.[10]

Therefore, with the help of the model of proactive motivation, this paper attempted to explore whether employees with POQ choose to CDB and whether their behaviour is influenced by leadership style from three aspects of "Can do", "Reason to" and "Energized to".[11] Based on this, this study constructed a preliminary theoretical model of the relationship between POQ and CDB, and discussed the moderating role of TL. The study expected to find the mechanism of action and the boundary of action of the three.

Hypotheses Development

The model of proactive motivation proposed by Parker and other scholars believes that employees' proactive behavior is based on three aspects of motivation, respectively "Can do", "Reason to" and "Energized to".[11] The "can do" state maps to the main question is, "Can I do this?". This forms the primary internal reasons for implementing proactive behavior. the "reason to" state maps onto why people engage in behavior (e.g., Do I want to do this? Why should I act?). The "energized to" as the key direct affect pathway influencing goal generation and striving across a range of proactive goals. Although CDB violate organizational norms, they are voluntary behaviors.[12] From the perspective of behavioral connotation, CDB are deviant behaviors conducted by employees under the control of positive motivation for the noble intention of taking the organization as their own responsibility in order to increase the well-being of the organization and employees.[13] Its essence lies in being an initiative behavior. Therefore, this study can draw on the model of proactive motivation to explain the logical relationship between research variables.

POQ and Constructive Deviant Behaviour

Analyzing from the perspective of "Can do", POQ is a subjective assessment by employees that their qualifications, education level, work experience, and skills exceed the requirements of their present role. This assessment is tightly linked to judgments of personal competence. Firstly, individuals who sense an overqualification believe they are not merely adept at their current jobs but also possess the capacity to introduce innovative ideas, challenge existing norms, and naturally incline towards exhibiting proactive behaviors that are within their scope of abilities.[14] Their inherent belief in their own competency engenders a propensity to transcend routine responsibilities and actively contribute to their domain. Secondly, such employees often exhibit efficiency in completing their tasks, which in turn affords them additional time for introspection and creative thinking. This extra time can foster an environment wherein they can engage in divergent thinking, make novel associations, and draw analogies, all of which elevate the possibility of disrupting the status quo and fostering innovation.[15] Finally, from the standpoint of self-verification theory, employees who perceive themselves as overqualified are more inclined to approach complex, challenging tasks. They are driven by a desire for recognition from their peers, seeking to validate their self-concept and abilities. This willingness to engage with rigorous tasks not only serves their

need for acknowledgement but also bridges the gap between their perceived capabilities and the opportunities to apply them, thereby further cementing their role within the organization and enhancing their job satisfaction.[16] Together, these behaviors not only facilitate personal growth but are inherently beneficial for organizational advancement. They typically expand beyond routine tasks and can be characterized as Creative Deviance Behaviors (CDB), which are essential for fostering an innovative and dynamic work environment.

In the context of “Energized to” individuals often evaluate their circumstances by comparing their inputs, outcomes, and current state with the potential state they believe they deserve. When a significant mismatch arises between the outcomes received and those expected, a sense of deprivation can emerge. This sense of deprivation intensifies with the magnitude of the disparity, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, or even anger, as posited by Crosby. According to relative deprivation theory, individuals who perceive themselves as overqualified are prone to experiencing pronounced feelings of deprivation and heightened negative emotions. This emotional response creates a cycle of deprivation and feedback, amplifying emotional expression and serving as a source of energy motivation. Consequently, individuals are more predisposed to engage in proactive behaviors as a means to address their perceived discrepancies.[6] This cycle of deprivation-driven energy not only propels individuals towards proactive action but also underscores the significance of addressing the underlying causes of POQ within organizational contexts. By acknowledging and effectively managing these disparities, organizations can harness the resulting energy motivation to drive positive change and foster a more fulfilling work environment. Based on the above analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: *the POQ positively promotes CDB.*

The Moderator Effect of Transformational Leadership

Avigating the intricacies of risk evaluation in the workplace involves a multifaceted process, encompassing motivation and subsequent employee behavior, as noted by Parker, Bindl, and Strauss (2010).[11] Constructive deviant behaviors (CDB) possess a dual nature, blending legitimate motivation with potentially illicit approaches. Employees engaging in such behaviors risk violating organizational norms and challenging leadership authority and status, potentially leading to criticism or punishment from superiors. According to the conservation of resources theory, employees, being fundamentally rational, carefully weigh the risks and benefits associated with engaging in constructive deviant behavior. Only when the perceived benefits outweigh the potential losses are employees inclined to exhibit such behavior.[17] Therefore, for employees to embrace CDB, they not only require ability and energy motivation but also support and guidance from leaders to mitigate associated risks. According to the model of proactive motivation, leaders play a crucial role in stimulating and influencing employees' proactive behaviors.[11] Moreover, leadership style is an important situational factor influencing employees' engagement in CDB.[12] Consequently, it becomes imperative to explore the nuanced effects of leadership styles on employee behavior within organizational contexts.

Current research on leadership styles on constructive transgressions has mainly explored various leadership styles such as coaching leadership, empowering leadership, humble leadership, authentic leadership, and ethical leadership.[18–20] Transformational leadership (TL), characterized by proactivity, a love for challenges, sociability, and influence, stimulates employees' higher-level needs through aspects such as leadership charm, charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.[21] It motivates employees to strive for goals.[22] As a trigger for organizational change, TL not only helps employees fulfill their in-role behaviors,[23] but also inspires subordinates to engage in extra-role behaviors and even to take on certain risks. From the perspective of social exchange theory, TL are good establishing high-quality exchange relationships with their employees, providing employees with recognition and support through personalised care, fostering exploratory thinking, inspiring employees through personal charisma and inspiration, and constructing a better vision for the organisation for them.[24] In organizational contexts with a high level of TL style, employees receive firm emotional support, amplifying both the ability and energy motivation of employees with a sense of overqualification, while also providing them with certain reasons for motivation.[25] However, when the organization lacks a significant TL and there is

insufficient leadership, charisma, and support for employee behavior, it is challenging to establish high-quality exchange relationships between leaders and employees, and overqualified employees are less likely to actively engage in organizational change efforts, which is unfavorable for CDB.[25] Based on the above analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: *TL strengthens the positive relationship between POQ and CDB*

Intergenerational Differences in the Relationship between POQ and CDB

Parker (2010) proposed personal values are important contextual factors influencing employees' engagement in proactive behaviors through the model of proactive motivation.[11] Liu also pointed out that individuals' work behaviors are governed by work values, which externalize positive or negative factors from work values by impacting people's cognitive structures, manifesting as positive or negative attitudes towards work.[26,27] However, influenced by different life environments, experiences, and backgrounds, employees from different generations form differentiated work values. Older employees prioritize status and independence values, especially responsibility, morality, and tradition, while emphasizing material achievements and power acquisition.[28] Conversely, younger generations focus on the enjoyment and ease of work,[27] considering poetry and distant places equally important.[28] Due to these value differences, employees hold varying expectations and priorities regarding the organization, leading to different risk-benefit assessments and subsequent behaviors within the same organizational environment. As previously discussed, constructive deviant behavior itself entails a comprehensive risk assessment process.[11] Due to intergenerational differences in work values, there are variations in the perceived risk assessments of CDB. For instance, older individuals may overestimate risks while younger ones may underestimate them. Consequently, they hold different views on CDB, exhibit varying levels of energy motivation, and demonstrate different forms of CDB.

On the other hand, POQ is a subjective judgment, and employees from different generations may have different self-awareness. Indeed, the majority of those born in the 1990s have been in the workforce for over a decade, accumulating rich experience and matured job skills. Coupled with the superior educational environment enjoyed by this generation, they have had more opportunities for education and skills training. This may lead to a higher degree of perceived overqualification.

The analysis above indicates two issues: firstly, older employees tend to overestimate the risks associated with constructive deviant behavior; secondly, there are differences in the perception of overqualification among generational employees. Based on this analysis, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: *There are generational differences in the effect of POQ on CDB*

Intergenerational Differences in the Moderator Effect of TL

Behavioral decision theory points out that human rationality lies between complete rationality and complete irrationality, and is easily affected by perceptual bias when identifying problems and making decisions. The decision-making process of employees experiencing overqualification involves a game-like assessment of perceptions related to POQ, TL, and CDB. Following a risk-benefit evaluation, employees are inclined to accept their role if the pros and cons are deemed balanced. During the appraisal phase, transformational leaders wield considerable influence over employees' assessments by offering personalized emotional support through tailored behavioral strategies. However, the degree to which such leaders provide emotional backing and the inclination of employees to enhance their own skills and motivation are intricately linked to subjective evaluations. As outlined in the aforementioned analysis, notable generational disparities exist in how values impact subjective assessments (Meng, Chai & Huang, 2020). Building upon these insights, we posit the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 4: *There were also generational differences in the moderating effect.*

The research model of this study was shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

This study adopts the intergenerational boundaries division proposed by Meng,[27] which categorizes employees into three groups: "Post-90s" individuals born after 1990, "Post-80s" individuals born between 1980 and 1990, and "Post-70s" individuals born between 1970 and 1980. The survey was conducted twice, in July and September 2022, with 700 questionnaires distributed. After eliminating invalid questionnaires, 525 valid responses were obtained, indicating a questionnaire's efficiency of 75%. Among them, there were 152 Post-70s employees, accounting for 28.95%, 198 post-80s employees, accounting for 37.71%, and 175 post-90s employees, accounting for 33.33%. In terms of gender, there are 238 male employees, accounting for 45.33%, and 287 female employees, accounting for 54.67%. In terms of age, there are 68 people under the age of 25, accounting for 12.95, 107 people aged 25-30, accounting for 20.38%, 115 people aged 31-35, accounting for 21.90%, 83 people aged 36-40, accounting for 15.81%, and 152 people aged 41 and above, accounting for 28.95%. In terms of educational level, 135 people had a college degree or below, accounting for 25.71%; 325 people had a bachelor's degree, accounting for 55.05%; and 65 people had a master's degree or above, accounting for 12.38%.

Measurement

This study's research on the variables draws on mature and authoritative scales. To eliminate the influence of translation and cultural expression as far as possible, five enterprise management professors and doctoral students were invited to jointly confirm, modify, and improve the questionnaire. All items were measured using five-point Likert scales anchored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Perceived overqualification ($\alpha = 0.905$)

POQ was measured using the nine-item Scale developed by Maynard.[29] The scale measures POQ as a whole and is a unidimensional scale with nine questions. The scale has been widely used in previous studies and has been shown to have high reliability and validity.[16,30] A sample item is "I have more abilities than I need in order to do my job". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.905 and the KMO is 0.935.

Constructive deviant behavior ($\alpha = 0.89$)

CDB was measured using a scale developed by Galperin,[31] which is composed of 16 items, including three dimensions: innovation (five items), challenge (six items), and interpersonal (five items). The sample item is "I am happy to find innovative ways to solve problems". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.890 and the KMO is 0.905.

Transformational leadership ($\alpha = 0.815$)

TL was measured using a scale based on the 16-item scale of Li,[32] which contains four dimensions: charismatic leadership, ethical example, personality care, and visionary motivation. The sample item is "My leader is enterprising and career-minded, and is highly motivated to do his or her job". The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.815.

Control Variables

In order to more accurately determine the influence relationship between the variables, gender, education, work experience, years of working experience in this company, position, and the number of job-hopping were introduced into the regression analysis as control variables to exclude potential substitution variables and make the results more scientific, and the selection of this control variable was consistent with previous studies.[27,30]

Analysis Method

Based on our knowledge of intergenerational differences and the content of the study. In this paper, stepwise regression and group regression were conducted using SPSS24.0. Stepwise regression focuses on verifying the main and moderating effects of the total sample's sense of POQ and CDB as well as TL, and subgroup regression focuses on verifying the main effect as well as the generational differences in the moderating effect.

Results

Homologous Variance Test

This study adopted two methods to control homologous variance. Firstly, the anonymous filling of the questionnaire was emphasized in order to collect more accurate questionnaire data. Secondly, the sequence of questionnaire questions, particularly the order of measurement items related to research variables, was deliberately disrupted to prevent respondents from falling into a pattern of single-mindedly filling out the questionnaire. The Harman single-factor method was used to further explore the problem of homologous variance. A comprehensive factor analysis was conducted on all measurement items, revealing characteristic values greater than 1. Under unrotated conditions, the first principal component explained 24.362% of the total variance, significantly less than 50%, suggesting that homologous variance in the survey data was acceptable.

Reliability and Validity

The method of reliability and validity tests is more authoritative and has been adopted by scholars.[16,30] As described in the previous variable measurements, the Cronbach's alpha indexes for the sense of POQ, TL and CDB were 0.905, 0.815 and 0.809, indicating the questionnaire had good reliability. In this paper, AMOS23.0 analysis software was used to test the validity of the scale by validation factor analysis of the data. It was found that the three factors had the best model superiority ($\chi^2/df=1.843<3$, RMSEA=0.040<0.05, IFI=0.945>0.9, CFI=0.944>0.9, TLI=0.936>0.9), and the other alternative competition models are inferior to the hypothetical models proposed in this study.

Correlation Analysis

According to the intergenerational perspective of the study, the variable correlation analysis is further divided into three groups of data "post-70s", "post-80s" and "post-90s" based on the "total sample" analysis. Thus, it is easier to distinguish the cognitive differences in research variables between different generations from the perspective of descriptive analysis. Table 1 presents the results. It is obvious from the data in the table that the value of POQ is the largest among the "post-70s," the smallest among the "post-80s". The average value of the "post-90s" is 3.423, second only to the "post-70s." The possible reasons for the above overqualified feelings are as follows: First, most post-70s employees have very rich work experience, which makes them think they are highly capable, even if their educational background is not high; second, the post-90s employees are in a superior educational environment. However, severe employment competition makes some jobseekers unsatisfactory, resulting in a strong POQ. The value of TL is the largest among the "post-70s" and the smallest among the "post-80s". In addition, the value of constructive deviant behavior is the largest among the "post-90s" and the smallest among the "post-70s". These intuitive data are consistent with the judgments of intergenerational employees. In the superior living environment, especially the "only child" era, the post-90s have a more prominent personality and a weaker spirit of hard work, this leads the "post-90s" pursuit of more fairness and justice, a stronger sense of self-centered, and are more likely to have dissatisfaction and opinions about organizational rules. Thus, they exhibited deviant behavior. In addition, according to the correlation coefficient analysis of the three groups, the group of POQ and constructive deviant behavior and the group of TL and constructive deviant behavior both show obviously positive correlation with different coefficients, and the correlation coefficients are less than their respective reliability values. Therefore, it can be preliminary determined that research on variables can be further explored and analyzed to disassemble the causal relationships between variables.

Hypothetical Test

The multilevel linear regression model is used to analyse the influence of POQ on employees' CDB and the moderating effect of TL, and the group regression is used to analyse the generational differences in the influence of the three effects, and the specific results are shown in Table 2. Taking the data of 'post-70s' as an example, the specific regression paths are as follows: model 1 adds the control variables, model 2 adds the independent variable of POQ, model 3 adds the moderator variable of TL, and model 4 adds the interaction term of POQ and TL. The data for other employees were analysed along the same path.

Analysis of Main Effect

Using the total sample data, a main effects analysis was conducted as shown in Table 2. Model 1 included control variables such as gender, age, education, years of work experience, tenure with the current company, position, and number of job changes. It was found that gender was significantly negatively correlated with constructive deviant behavior ($\beta = -0.156$, $p < 0.050$), indicating that females are more likely to engage in CDB compared to males. Education was significantly positively correlated with constructive deviant behavior ($\beta = 0.277$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that employees with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in CDB. These relationships remained largely consistent in subsequent regression models.

Model 2 added POQ to Model 1, and the results showed a significant positive relationship between POQ and CDB ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.05$). With the regression results of other control variables remaining largely unchanged, the R^2 noticeably increased, indicating that POQ has a significant influence on CDB, thus validating hypothesis H1.

The interaction regulation diagrams are shown in Figure 2.

Analysis of Moderator Effect

As shown in Table 2, the results from Models 3 and 4 indicate that TL is positively associated with constructive deviant behavior. The interaction term between POQ and TL yielded a positive and significant coefficient ($\beta = .078$, $p < .01$), indicating that TL positively moderates the relationship between POQ and CDB. This finding validates hypothesis H2.

Intergenerational Differences

To validate hypothesis H3, the research sample was divided into three groups based on birth cohorts, and regression analyses were conducted as shown in Models 6, 10, and 14 in Table 2. The results revealed positive correlations between POQ and constructive deviant behavior, with coefficients of 0.253, 0.374, and 0.324, respectively, all passing significance tests at the 1% level. Numerically, the promoting effect of POQ on constructive deviant behavior was strongest among the post-80s cohort and weakest among the post-70s cohort, thus confirming hypothesis H3.

Furthermore, in the subgroup regression models (Models 8, 12, and 16 in Table 2), it was observed that the moderating effect of TL also exhibited notable intergenerational differences. Specifically, TL strengthened the promoting effect of POQ on CDB among employees from the post-70s and post-80s cohorts, with interaction term coefficients of 0.103 and 0.106, respectively, both passing significance tests at the 5% level. However, TL did not demonstrate a significant moderating effect among the post-90s cohort. One possible explanation could be that post-90s employees, compared to their older counterparts, have relatively shorter tenure in the workforce and may not have developed strong relationships or high levels of information exchange with their leaders. Consequently, they may harbor more skepticism towards leadership behaviors and may not readily change their behaviors without definitive answers, considering the costs and benefits. Based on this analysis, hypothesis H4 can be deemed valid.

Discussion

This study utilized data from 525 primary questionnaire surveys. The research reveals that employees who feel overqualified are more likely to engage in CDB. When an employee's personal qualifications exceed job requirements, they may feel that their ideal self and developmental expectations cannot be met in the current work context. This amplifies their "Can do", "Reason to" and "Energized to", making them more likely to exhibit constructive deviant behavior. This finding is consistent with the results of Arvan's study (2019).[1] Secondly, the effect of POQ on promoting CDB varies between generations; it is strongest for employees born in the 1980s and weakest for those born in the 1970s. This may be related to individual characteristics, values, beliefs, and expectations, particularly cognitive differences.[27]

This study also found that TL plays a moderating role in the relationship between POQ and CDB, and this moderating effect varies across generations. TL can inspire employees and help them achieve a higher level of performance than previously thought possible.[33] TL can have a profound and extraordinary impact on followers. Therefore, under the guidance of TL, employees who feel

overqualified are more willing to pursue high-quality goals and self-actualization, where CDB is one way employees express their behavior.

Theoretical Implications

A substantial body of research, both primary studies and narrative reviews, has helped to lay theoretical groundwork for the POQ literature.[6,15,34] This study enriches the theoretical basis for understanding how POQ affects employee behavior and validates the explanatory power of the model of proactive motivation on employee behavior. Previous research on POQ was theoretically limited to person-environment fit theory, relative deprivation theory, and equity theory, which led to paradoxical conclusions. This paper focuses on the model of proactive motivation, explaining the behavior of overqualified employees through “Can do”, “Reason to” and “Energized to”, which marks the first difference from previous studies.

Secondly, this study expands the research perspective on POQ and CDB from the angle of generational differences. Academic research has demonstrated that employees from different generations exhibit varying organizational behaviors due to differences in values within the same organizational environment.[27,35] However, there are relatively few studies on organizational behavior from the perspective of generational differences. This study reaffirms the importance of researching generational differences, marking the second distinction from previous research.

Finally, this study pays attention to the work context elements and recognizes the influence of leadership situations on employee behavior, reaffirming the importance of leadership behavior. The research found that TL moderates the behavior of employees feeling overqualified, particularly noticeable in the modulation of behaviors of employees born in the 1970s and 1980s. This finding is consistent with existing research results.[24]

We believe that the most significant contribution of this paper is our attention to the issue of generational differences. However, the majority of academic research has focused on the study of work values related to generational differences. To date, research on relevant variables concerning generational differences has predominantly been descriptive and lacks theoretical support.[35] As individuals born in the 1990s and 2000s enter the workforce, the issue of generational differences at work is becoming increasingly prominent. Life and theory tell us that employees from different generations exhibit significant differences in their lifestyles, learning, and work approaches. Our research, from the perspective of generational differences, investigates the impact of POQ on CDB and has discovered more nuanced mechanisms of influence. This research perspective also opens new directions for academic exploration. We believe that any issues concerning psychology and values can and should be analyzed through the lens of generational differences.

Practical Implication

The conclusions of this study have significant implications for enterprise managers, particularly human resource managers, aiming to conduct high-quality human resource management. The findings can assist managers in more effectively managing employees with POQ. Firstly, managers need to change their management philosophies and correctly understand deviant behavior and CDB. It is important to establish relatively flexible and resilient institutional mechanisms, understanding the relationship between formal and informal rules to maintain a dynamic balance between the two. Managers should acknowledge the inevitability and necessity of positive informal behaviors and acts of deviance, proactively learn, and explore possibilities to transform them positively. Secondly, managers need to create a free and transformative atmosphere, providing employees with more opportunities and platforms for innovation, and utilizing excess qualifications to improve workforce quality. As pointed out by Ginevicius (2020), [36] insufficient workforce quality can slow down economic growth if it fails to meet market needs. Therefore, managers need to understand the true thoughts of employees with high qualifications surplus, create conditions, and guide them reasonably to utilize their talents. By doing so, they can reduce the issue of qualifications surplus, explore potential learning opportunities, and continuously enhance workforce quality. Thirdly, managers not only need to cultivate a TL but also conduct structural analysis of company employees to grasp intergenerational differences. At the same time, managers should pay particular attention to intergenerational differences in employees' perceived overqualification, constructive deviance, perceived fairness, and so on.

Limitations and Future Research

As in most studies, our study has limitations. Due to constraints on resources and time, this study did not strictly adhere to stratified sampling. While random sampling or selecting representative samples are viable alternatives, they may compromise the representativeness of the research findings. In the future, if permitted, conducting a more scientifically rigorous investigation on the sample would be advisable.

In addition, this study focused on generational differences among samples from the Post-70s, Post-80s and Post-90s samples, and in fact some Post-00s have already entered the workplace. However, as they are just starting their careers, most are in their first year of employment or internship, and their work situation is highly unstable. Hence, they were not included in this study. Nonetheless, as individuals from the 2000s cohort gradually enter the workforce, research on their POQ and behavioral dynamics will also be highly significant to explore.

Conclusions

In this paper, we used proactive motivation theory to investigate the relationship between POQ and CDB, as well as the moderating role of TL. We also discussed generational differences in these relationships. The findings were consistent with our expectations and were largely validated. In conclusion, The findings of the study tell us that imbalances in organisations may also be beneficial to organisational development as long as managers manage them correctly.

Ethical Statement: The study followed the ethical principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration 1964 and its subsequent amendments. In addition, all participants provided informed consent before participating in the study.

Disclosure: The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

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