

## Over-qualification in Young Spanish Workers: A Decade of Research at IDOCAL

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### Abstract

Over-Qualification is a common phenomenon in industrialized societies, and it has received increasing interest from social scientists in recent years. The main purpose of this paper is to summarize the main findings obtained from a decade of research on Over-qualification and related topics at IDOCAL (Research Institute on HR Psychology, Organizational Development and Quality of Working Life; University of Valencia). Drawing on extensive surveys of young people entering the labour market and graduates of the University of Valencia, our research team developed a number of contributions on over-qualification and education-related person-job fit. This paper presents an overview of these findings, organized in three different sections: the relationships between employability as psychological resources and perceived employability and over-qualification and career success, the relationships between over-qualification and different job outcomes (such as job satisfaction, propensity to leave, and performance), and the evolution over time of over-qualified employees in terms of career outcomes.

**Keywords:** over-qualification, career success, employability.

### Superqualificação em Jovens Trabalhadores Espanhóis: Uma Década de Pesquisa no IDOCAL

#### Resumo

A superqualificação é um fenómeno comum nas sociedades industrializadas e tem recebido interesse crescente de cientistas sociais nos últimos anos. O objetivo principal deste artigo é resumir os principais resultados obtidos em uma década de pesquisa sobre a sobrequalificação e tópicos relacionados no IDOCAL (Instituto de Pesquisa em Psicologia de RH, Desenvolvimento Organizacional e Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho; Universidade de Valência). Com base em extensas pesquisas com jovens que entram no mercado de trabalho e graduados da Universidade de Valência, nossa equipe de pesquisa desenvolveu uma série de contribuições sobre a superqualificação e a adequação pessoa-emprego relacionada à educação. Este artigo apresenta uma visão geral dessas conclusões, organizadas em três seções diferentes: as relações entre empregabilidade como recursos psicológicos e empregabilidade percebida e superqualificação e sucesso na carreira, as relações entre superqualificação e resultados de trabalho diferentes (como satisfação no trabalho, propensão sair e desempenho), e a evolução ao longo do tempo de funcionários sobrequalificados em termos de resultados de carreira.

**Palavras-chave:** superqualificação, sucesso na carreira, empregabilidade.

### Sobrecualificación en Jóvenes Trabajadores Españoles: Una Década de Investigación en IDOCAL

#### Resumen

La sobrecualificación es un fenómeno común en las sociedades industrializadas y ha recibido un interés creciente por parte de los científicos sociales en los últimos años. El objetivo principal de este artículo es resumir los principales hallazgos obtenidos durante una década de investigación sobre Sobrecualificación y temas afines en IDOCAL (Instituto de Investigación en Psicología de RRHH, Desarrollo Organizacional y Calidad de Vida Laboral; Universidad de Valencia). A partir de encuestas exhaustivas de jóvenes que ingresan al mercado laboral y graduados de la Universidad de Valencia, nuestro equipo de investigación desarrolló una serie de contribuciones sobre la sobrecualificación y la adecuación persona-trabajo relacionada con la educación. Este artículo presenta una descripción general de estos hallazgos, organizados en tres secciones diferentes: las relaciones entre la empleabilidad como recursos psicológicos y la empleabilidad percibida y la sobrecualificación y el éxito profesional, las relaciones entre la sobrecualificación y los diferentes resultados laborales (como la satisfacción laboral, la propensión dejar, y desempeño), y la evolución en el tiempo de los empleados sobrecualificados en términos de resultados profesionales.

**Palabras clave:** sobrecualificación, éxito profesional, empleabilidad.

Work is one of the main domains of human life. It not only contributes to obtaining economic resources to cover human material needs, but it also provides social and emotional stimuli that contribute to human psychosocial development, satisfying different psychosocial functions (Salanova et al, 1996). Work is usually the base for citizenship and gives people the opportunity to start an independent life, form a family, or begin an individual life project, in pursuit of personal and professional values and goals. Work and Organizational Psychology has paid attention to the process of entering the labour force, especially in the early years. This interest has led to an extensive line of research, first in UIPOT (Research Unit on Work and Organizational Psychology) and later in IDOCAL (Research Institute on Personnel Psychology, Organizational Development and Quality of Working Life) at the University of Valencia. This paper aims to summarize the main findings obtained from the research on Human Capital and Youth Labour Insertion by the research team initiated and led by Prof. Peiró, with special mention of findings on over-qualification from the past decade. Over-qualification is defined as a surplus of individuals' acquired education, competencies, or work experience, with regard to the requirements of the job performed (Maynard et al., 2006).

In the next section, we will present the origins of this research line and an overview of the main topics covered, whereas the following sections we will address the main results on over-qualification and its relationships with different antecedents, consequences, and moderator variables. Over-qualification has received great interest because the detrimental consequences for workers. Our summary aims to shed light on recent advances on this topic.

### Human Capital and Youth Labour Insertion Research: the Origins

Youth labour insertion has captured the interest of work psychologists. The international project “Meaning of Working”, developed in the 1970s and early 80s, established the antecedents for designing a new international project focused specifically on the socialization process of young people at work, the changes in their work values, the initial career path as well as career success and other work outcomes. The WOSY project (WOrk Socialization of Youth) collected data from eight European countries, and it provided a rich picture of the Spanish youths' employment (Peiró et al., 1993; Prieto et al., 1994). This project started our research line on “Human Capital and Youth Labour Insertion”.

After the WOSY project, it was created the Observatory of Youth Labour Insertion<sup>1</sup>, with the outstanding contribution of Prof. Peiró. The Observatory collected cross-sectional data from a representative sample of Spanish youths every three years from 1996 to 2011. Main results from each wave were summarized in different reports (García-Montalvo et al., 1997, 2003, 2006; García-Montalvo & Peiró, 2001, 2009, 2011; Peiró et al., 2006). The next landmark was the creation of the Observatory of Labour Insertion and Occupational Counseling (OPAL) at the University of Valencia in 2003, a university service designed to provide information, training, and professional support and research about graduates' labour entry process. This service, under the direction of Prof. Peiró (2003-2009) and Prof. González-Romá (2009-2018), produced different reports and papers on the careers initiated by graduates, master degree graduates, and doctoral program graduates (Gómez-Artiga et al., 2013; Martínez & Rocabert, 2014; OPAL, 2007; 2008; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018).

Human Capital and Youth Labour Insertion has been a

fruitful line of research that has addressed different topics, such as the *Socialization process and youth labour insertion* (Palací & Peiró, 1995; Peiró & Moret, 1987). In addition, the moderation of the relationship between *job insecurity* and job attitudes and outcomes among youngsters (Peiró et al., 2007a; Peiró et al., 2012) and adult workers included variables such as climate strength, employability, job dependence, occupational group, and organizational support (Silla et al., 2009; 2010; Sora et al., 2010a; 2010b; 2011a, 2011b; 2013; 2014). *Perceived employability*, its antecedents, and consequences, was the topic of a number of IDOCAL studies (Gamboa et al., 2009; Low, 2019). The role of adverse labour market conditions in the relationship between *well-being and personal resources*, perceived employability, job insecurity, and unemployment was also studied (Low et al., 2020; Peiró & Ramos, 2013; Ramos & Peiró, 2013). Peiró et al. (2015) proposed a person-centric approach to the study of young people's unemployment and underemployment by considering the person and his/her circumstances. The meaning of work and socialization processes, the work context and experiences, the value placed on other life spheres, the role of family, policies, and employment and unemployment regulations, and a life span perspective that includes biographical and career projects should be taken into account to make sense of the way young people experience unemployment and underemployment.

Nevertheless, in recent years, this research area has mainly focused on employability as a psychosocial resource, over-qualification, and indicators of career fit and job quality. The aim of this paper is to summarize the main results from the studies that focused on over-qualification (in its different conceptualizations of over-education and skill mismatch) and its relationships with employability and career advancement variables among young people. In a recent extensive review on over-qualification, Ramos and Ramos (2020) depicted an integrative model of previous research on over-qualification (OQ hereinafter). The model includes different groups of antecedent variables of OQ, their main effects or outcomes, and several potential moderators of the relationships between over-qualification and its outcomes (see Figure 1). Following this overarching model, in the following pages we first summarize our recent research on the relationship between employability and over-qualification. Second, main results about the consequences of over-qualification are presented. Third, we focus on some studies dealing with the evolution of over-qualification and related issues. Finally, some concluding remarks and future research avenues are mentioned. The reviewed studies are cross-sectional, unless otherwise noted.

### Employability and Over-qualification

One of IDOCAL's recent research avenues in this area addresses the relationship between employability and over-qualification. Employability refers to individuals' ability to make labour transitions (as in keeping the current job or getting a new one), as a result of their know-how, skills, knowledge about the labour market, and adaptability (De Cuyper, 2008). It was studied both as perceived employability (the worker's perception of his/her capacity to keep the current job or get a new one; Peiró et al. 2012) and as a psychosocial resource (Fugate et al., 2004), composed of the dimensions of career identity, personal adaptability, human capital, and social capital. Employability can refer to either the internal labour market (job offers inside the current organization) or the external labour market (job opportunities outside the current organization). In addition, employability relies on internal factors (qualification, adaptability and flexibility of individuals, personal characteristics), as well as external factors (labour

<sup>1</sup> Information about the Observatory: [https://www.ivie.es/es\\_ES/bases-de-datos/capital-humano-y-desarrollo-humano/insersion-laboral/](https://www.ivie.es/es_ES/bases-de-datos/capital-humano-y-desarrollo-humano/insersion-laboral/)

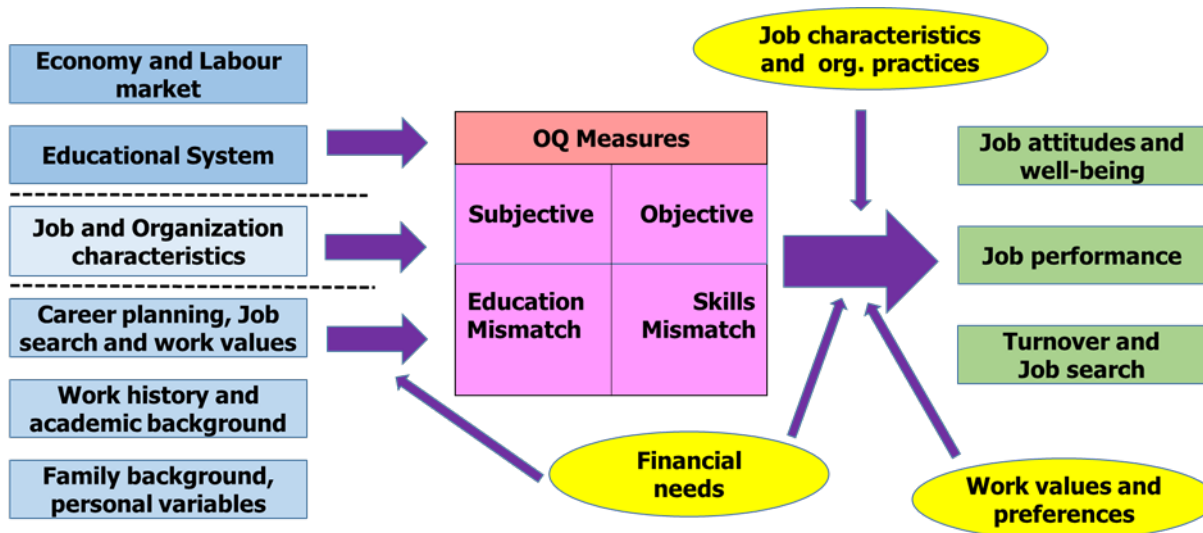


Figure 1. Overview of previous research on over-qualification (Ramos & Ramos, 2020).

demands, characteristics of jobs offered, and economic factors). Nevertheless, Fugate et al.'s model of employability outlines the relevance of four psychological resources in being employable. Perceived employability, on the other hand, focuses on individuals' self-awareness of their capacity to remain in the current job or obtain a preferred one, viewed as a whole and not focusing on specific dimensions. Perceived employability implicitly integrates both internal and external conditions related to the possibilities of being employable.

OQ is considered a mismatch between the employee's level of qualifications, skills, education, or work experiences and the level of qualification, education, or experience required to do the current job (Maynard et al., 2006). When the subject has a higher level than what is required by the job in terms of education, skills, and experience, this mismatch is called OQ, which can be distinguished as over-education, skill mismatch, or over-experience. OQ is viewed as a negative personal experience leading to reduced career success perceptions and lower job satisfaction, being a relevant problem for individuals and organizations. The efforts made to achieve the desired qualifications are not rewarded by the job obtained, thus wasting personal and social resources. Nevertheless, some IDOCAL studies have considered vertical misfit (the individual has a different level of competences than what is required) as a measure of OQ. It is usually measured as the difference between the education level currently held by the job occupant and the level of competences required for the job. Based on the model presented in Figure 1, this avenue of research focuses on employability, which is considered a personal antecedent of OQ, with occasional consideration of other variables (career-related variables and the educational system). Within this series of studies, the first one focuses on social class as an antecedent of social capital, and with tolerance to OQ (being more prone to accepting being over-qualified) as a career-related variable. The other reviewed studies focus on Fugate's model of employability, including mediator variables (perceived employability) and moderators. Moreover, one of these studies includes the orientation of the education attained (practice-oriented vs. academically focused) as a potential antecedent.

González-Romá et al. (2018a) tested two mediation models between social class (social status depending on family income and educational level) and perceived OQ (a measure combining over-education and being over-skilled) among university graduates. Graduates who belong to higher social classes have more access to formal social networks, establish more informal contacts with people linked to different network members, and they will have more social capital, information and contacts to get a suitable job

than people in lower classes. In addition, people with lower social capital could be aware of their limitations in obtaining well-fitted jobs and be more tolerant of OQ, which in turn would lead them to accept jobs beneath their qualification level. In a two-wave panel design with more than 500 graduates, the study found evidence for the double mediation model. Social class positively predicted social capital, which in turn negatively predicted tolerance of OQ, which in turn predicted OQ. No direct relationship between social capital and over-qualification was found, only an indirect effect through tolerance to OQ. Thus, people from lower social classes had less social capital and developed more tolerance to being over-qualified, and so they were more likely to accept a job for which they were over-qualified. Social class influenced OQ through a human capital and individuals' different tolerance levels to OQ.

González-Romá et al. (2018b) tested the validity of Fugate et al.'s (2004) model of employability and its relationship with employment status and job quality in a sample of university graduates. Job quality included vertical mismatch and pay and job satisfaction. Dimensions of employability were defined as career identity, general self-efficacy (as personal adaptability), the specific degree obtained, postgraduate studies, job experience while studying (as indicators of human capital), and a two-item measure of social capital. Degree obtained, work experience, and social capital significantly predicted whether graduates were employed or not (employment status). In addition, career identity, social capital, and two human capital variables (degree obtained and job experience) positively predicted vertical match, whereas general self-efficacy negatively predicted vertical match, contrary to previous expectations (for 24% of variance explained). The authors attributed the unexpected general self-efficacy result to a net suppression effect of the error variance on other predictors that are positively correlated with self-efficacy. Thus, career identity, social capital, certain specific degrees, and work experience during their studies increased graduates' skill match, confirming the relevance of employability dimensions.

Characteristics of the educational system have been considered predictors of OQ. In this line, Hernández et al. (2017b) analysed whether the more or less professional and practical orientation of the instruction received was a predictor of OQ, and whether this relationship was mediated by the dimensions of employability as psychosocial resource in university graduates. Their findings did not show a direct relationship between the practical orientation of the university studies and perceived OQ, but they supported a mediated relationship through career identity. In addition, the practical orientation of the studies was significantly related to social capital, but social capital did not show a significant

relationship with perceived OQ.

Gamboa (2013) analysed the antecedents of job quality among university graduates, including vertical fit. Both perceived employability and Fugate's model of employability were considered in two different studies. The first study included as predictors of vertical fit the employability dimensions from Fugate et al.'s (2004) model (career identity, personal adaptability, human capital, and social capital). The degree studied, the field of study, and academic performance were the human capital variables included. Degree studied, career identity, and general self-efficacy together explained 17% of the variance in vertical fit. Graduates from Health and STEM showed lower levels of OQ than Humanities and Social Sciences' graduates. In a second study, graduates were asked directly to express whether they perceived that their qualifications exceeded the qualifications required by the job. Gamboa (2013) found perceived employability to be a negative predictor of perceived OQ.

Yeves (2015) also included perceived employability as a mediator when studying the relationship between employability as a psychosocial resource and vertical fit among university graduates. He paid special attention to different aspects of human capital, such as working while studying vs. exclusive dedication, or postgraduate training. His work found that exclusive dedication to studies favoured vertical match. When working while studying, only work experiences related to the field of studies were related to horizontal fit, but not to vertical fit. Postgraduate training and general self-efficacy (considered as personal adaptability) predicted perceived employability, which in turn predicted vertical fit. Thus, perceived employability partially mediated the relationship between human capital and general self-efficacy and vertical fit. Moreover, career identity and social capital were directly related to vertical fit, without being mediated by perceived employability.

Hernández et al. (2017a) took a further step by analysing whether core self-evaluations moderate the relationships between employability as psychosocial resource, perceived employability, and perceived OQ in a sample of university graduates. Core self-evaluations (CSE) are a composite construct made up of four dispositional interrelated variables (self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism). It reflects the way individuals perceive control over their lives and their worth as individuals (Jugde et al., 2002). Their results showed an indirect relationship between social capital and perceived OQ through perceived employability, as well as a direct relationship between personal adaptability and perceived OQ. Career identity was negatively related to perceived OQ, an effect that was moderated by core self-evaluations. Thus, graduates with higher career identity perceive less OQ, especially when they have more positive self-evaluations. Human capital, measured on a six-item perceived general competences scale, was not related to perceived employability neither perceived OQ in this study.

This stream of research points to the relevance of employability as a psychosocial resource in predicting OQ. Moreover, perceived employability seems to play a mediation role in the relationship between employability and OQ. Nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies in these findings. Evidence shows that employability predicts a relevant amount of OQ variance, ranging from 17% to 24%. Human capital, social capital, and career identity showed consistent predictive strength of OQ, whereas the role of personal adaptability (measured in the reviewed studies as general self-efficacy) remains less clear, suggesting the need to consider alternative measures of adaptability. In addition, perceived employability mediates the relationship between some dimensions of employability as psychosocial resource and OQ, but it is not always clear which dimensions have a direct effect

and which have a mediated effect through perceived employability. Along the aforementioned studies, career identity showed a consistent direct effect on OQ. However, human capital, social capital, and career adaptability showed direct and indirect (through perceived employability) effects on OQ in different studies. These results claim for the study of other potential moderators of the relationship between employability dimensions and OQ.

In addition, the aforementioned studies analysed the relevance of different human capital variables on OQ in detail. For graduates, the field of the degree obtained seems to be one of the best predictors of OQ, pointing to the relevance of a lack of job offers in certain areas (Humanities and Social Sciences), compared to the number of people from these fields searching for a qualified job. Only work experiences that are clearly related to the field of studies seem to decrease OQ. The perceived level of general competences did not predict OQ, whereas the more or less professional and practical orientation of the education received showed an indirect effect on OQ through career identity and social capital. Postgraduate training also had an indirect effect on OQ through perceived employability. Finally, other variables related to self-awareness seem to be related to OQ: Core self-evaluations and tolerance to OQ influence the relationship between employability as psychosocial resource and over-qualification. In the same vein, some demographic characteristics (i.e. social class) play a role in explaining OQ through employability and tolerance to OQ.

### Over-qualification and Job Outcomes

The second avenue of research on OQ developed at IDOCAL focus on the relationship between young people's OQ and some job outcomes, as well as its moderators. It is assumed that OQ reflects deprivation for over-qualified individuals because their jobs lack certain valued outcomes (equitable rewards for their qualifications, less job responsibilities, lack of opportunities to use skills, etc.). In this vein, OQ leads to poor job outcomes due to deprivation and less motivation toward jobs that do not offer the expected features (Erdogan et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to find out whether these detrimental effects of OQ could be buffered by moderator variables. Based on the model in Figure 1, the reviewed studies focused on the relationships between OQ and job satisfaction, turnover intentions, extra-role behaviours, well-being, and career variables. Some personal resources (employability, personal initiative, work values, and work centrality) as well as job and organizational variables (employment contract, salary, or organizational size) were considered as moderator variables.

Peiró et al. (2010) explored the relationships between OQ and three facets of job satisfaction (extrinsic, intrinsic, social facet), as well as the direct and moderating role of salary, employment contract, and work experience in these relationships. In a sample of 643 young Spanish employees (16-30 years old), OQ significantly predicted a small amount of variance of satisfaction facets (8% extrinsic, 6% intrinsic, 3% social). Moreover, high work experience emerged as a moderating factor that buffered the negative effect of OQ on extrinsic satisfaction. The employment contract and salary did not moderate these relationships. Thus, over-qualified workers with more previous work experience showed a smaller decrease in extrinsic satisfaction than over-qualified workers with less previous work experience did. It suggests some sort of resignation effect, as young people remain over-qualified for long time.

In the same line, Ramos et al. (2019) considered four variables related to job and career as moderators of the OQ-job satisfaction relationship. Work experience, career-enhancing

strategies, interactional justice, and job insecurity were considered buffering variables that could reduce the detrimental effects of OQ on job satisfaction. The effects of OQ on job satisfaction had been explained by relative deprivation theory (Feldman et al., 2002) and person-job fit theory (Edwards, 1991). A fair interaction with supervision could be considered a resource that could buffer the effects of deprivation, and a career-enhancing strategy could be considered an initiative to improve one's opportunities to progress (thus avoiding OQ). Moreover, work experience could facilitate a resignation effect, whereas young people experiencing job insecurity could appreciate a job beneath their qualification level because it would serve to avoid unemployment. To test these moderations, four separate series of regression analyses were performed. All the variables were causally related to job satisfaction facets, but only career-enhancing strategies (three facets) and interactional justice from supervision (intrinsic and extrinsic) moderated the detrimental effect of OQ on job satisfaction. Over-educated workers who carried out more career-enhancing actions and received fairer treatment from supervisors showed a smaller decrease in job satisfaction than over-qualified workers with fewer career-enhancing strategies and more unfair relationships with supervisors. Job insecurity and work experience did not moderate this relationship. The labour situation when the data were collected (2011, during the harsh moments of the economic downturn in Spain) could help to explain why these variables did not buffer the decrease in job satisfaction in over-qualified young people. Job insecurity was high for most young people, and in this uncertain work environment, resignation did not seem to occur.

Hernandez et al. (2012) examined the relationship between OQ and job satisfaction and turnover experiences. Young people could perceive OQ as a different experience depending on whether they were in an initial stage of their career (exploration) and their current employment was seen as transitory. Young people who were still studying could consider it a temporary situation (and maybe convenient), without affecting their job satisfaction. In addition, for workers who had previously been highly over-qualified, further OQ could be perceived as a less satisfactory condition than for workers who were overqualified for the first time. Finally, future expectations about OQ (for instance, if the individual expects to get a matched job soon) could buffer the effects of being overqualified on their satisfaction levels. Their results showed that continuing to study when over-qualified moderated the negative effects of OQ on job satisfaction, but not on past job turnover. Young people who were over-qualified in their previous job showed a smaller decrease in job satisfaction compared to young people who had not been over-qualified before. By contrast, expectations about future OQ moderated the relationship between OQ and turnover, but not for job satisfaction. Employees with higher OQ and high expectations of a better fitting job were less prone to stay in their jobs, due to voluntary and involuntary turnover.

Ramos et al. (2015) analysed the relationships between OQ and turnover intentions, with job insecurity as a mediator variable. Personal resources such as personal initiative, self-efficacy, and perceived employability were considered moderators of these relationships. The study compared data from two different labour market conditions (2008, before the economic crisis and in the middle of this crisis in 2011) in two samples of young employees (16-30 years-old). Before the crisis, OQ predicted turnover intentions, with a partially mediated effect through job insecurity. OQ only increased job insecurity among highly employable young people, whereas among low employable young people, job insecurity was high despite their OQ level. In addition, self-efficacy

moderated the relationship between job insecurity and turnover intentions. Young people with higher self-efficacy increased their turnover intentions less when they were insecure in their jobs than young people with lower self-efficacy. Moreover, results from the 2011 survey, during harsh economic and labour market conditions, showed that turnover intentions were predicted directly by OQ and job insecurity, and none of the moderators were significant. It seems that, under extremely difficult labour market conditions, job insecurity was not related to OQ. Young people who perceived themselves as over-qualified and more insecure in the job showed higher intentions to leave their companies than young people who were not as over-qualified or insecure at work.

Agut et al. (2009) analysed the effects of OQ on extra role behaviours (content innovation behaviours and career-enhancing strategies) among young workers who had just entered the labour market (16-30 years old). In addition, they analysed the role of intrinsic work values and personal initiative as antecedents of extra-role behaviours, as well as moderator variables between OQ and extra-role behaviours. Both extra-role behaviours examined were negatively predicted by OQ and positively by work values and personal initiative. Moreover, personal initiative moderated the negative effects of OQ on job content innovation. Because young people with higher personal initiative were more involved in job innovation, in over-qualified young people the decrease in job content innovation was more pronounced than in young people with lower personal initiative, even though they performed more innovative behaviours in absolute terms. In addition, a three-factor interaction was found for career-enhancing strategies. Young people with higher personal initiative and lower intrinsic work values were more involved in career-enhancing strategies when they were not over-qualified. However, only this group showed a more pronounced decrease in career-enhancing strategies when over-qualified. Although we could expect over-qualified workers to be involved in more extra-role behaviours as a coping strategy to escape from an undesired work situation, this is not the case. Instead, over-qualification seems to be more detrimental for people with higher initiative and lower intrinsic work values. Following Social Exchange theory, over-qualified people would reduce their contributions at work due to not receiving the expected outcomes (a job that meets their qualification and expectations).

Wellbeing is another outcome traditionally associated with OQ. Tomás et al. (2018) analysed the relationship between OQ and engagement, and the moderation of organizational size. Two alternative hypotheses were considered. If OQ leads to lower levels of engagement as a consequence of demotivation toward jobs that do not offer the expected features, organizational size could buffer this effect because big companies provide more opportunities for promotion and access to more qualified jobs. Nevertheless, in bigger companies, employees' sense of belonging could decrease, thus intensifying the negative effect of OQ on engagement. A sample of graduates expressed their perceived OQ six months after graduation, and six months later, they expressed their engagement levels. The results showed that the detrimental effects of OQ on engagement were stronger among graduates from bigger companies, thus supporting the intensification hypothesis. It seems that bigger companies did not offer more opportunities to obtain a matched job inside the company. Conversely, the engagement of overqualified people in smaller companies decreases less, probably because a stronger sense of belonging contributes to maintaining certain levels of motivation in over-qualified employees.

Finally, Ramos and Hernández (2014) analysed the relationships between OQ and different career-related variables (work values, work centrality, job insecurity, and preferences

for flexibility at work). Their study hypothesized that OQ would influence work identity, reducing work centrality and affecting intrinsic and extrinsic work values. In addition, OQ as deprivation could affect self-perceptions of one's position in the labour market, reducing perceived employability and increasing perceived insecurity. Moreover, OQ could affect preferences for flexibility, either preferring OQ in order to avoid undesired flexible job features (stepping-stone hypothesis) or preferring other forms of flexibility at work to escape from OQ (OQ as a trap hypothesis). Work centrality and work values could moderate this relationship. Their results from two cross-sectional waves of data from the Observatory for Youth Labour Insertion (2008 and 2011, before and during the harsh economic crisis after 2008) showed that OQ was associated with lower work centrality, lower intrinsic work values, and higher employability in both waves. OQ was associated with lower extrinsic work values and preference for intrinsic flexibility only in 2008 (before the crisis) and with higher job insecurity and preferences for extrinsic flexibility only in 2011 (during the crisis). Before the crisis, over-qualified people preferred more flexible conditions in terms of intrinsic characteristics (position changes, self-employed, or jobs not matching their qualifications) than individuals who were not over-qualified. During harsh market conditions, OQ reduced preferences for extrinsic flexibility only in less employable young people. If young people feel less employable, they tend to prefer OQ to extrinsic flexibility. Instead, highly employable young people seem to prefer extrinsic flexibility to OQ. Similarly, young people with higher extrinsic work values increase their preferences for extrinsic flexibility as OQ increases, whereas young people with lower extrinsic work values decrease their preferences for extrinsic flexibility as OQ increases. All these results suggest that OQ is a phenomenon related to the perceived employability of young people, as well as their career value preferences.

This research stream extends our understanding of OQ and its relationships with job outcomes, but the cross-sectional design requires caution when interpreting the results. Whereas economic research (for instance, Human Capital theory) attributes OQ to labour market inefficiency, assuming its temporary nature, psychosocial research focuses mainly on the consequences of OQ resulting from an imbalance between the scarcity of qualified job offers and an excess of qualified workers. This imbalance leads individuals to choose or accept being over-qualified to avoid unemployment or in exchange for other job features. Relative deprivation (Feldman et al., 2002) and person-job fit (Edwards, 1991) theories explain why over-qualified workers show lower job satisfaction, less motivation at work, and, frequently, lower performance and higher intentions to leave.

Main contributions of the aforementioned studies are the following. First, OQ seems to be associated with some motivational constructs such as work centrality and work values. Distinct preferences for intrinsic or extrinsic job features could lead some people to accept being over-qualified instead of suffering from extrinsic flexibility (i.e. preferring to be over-qualified rather than moving away to search for a better job), and work values could influence the future preferences of over-qualified people (i.e., preferring some extrinsic flexibility instead of remaining over-qualified).

Second, these findings confirm that OQ decreases job satisfaction and some extra-role behaviours and increases intentions to quit. However, several variables moderate these effects, allowing companies to buffer the detrimental effects of hiring over-qualified workers. Interactional justice seems to reduce the decrease in job satisfaction, supporting deprivation theory: justice is a resource that could complement the lack of

other resources produced by OQ. If over-qualified people possess high levels of personal initiative, they can maintain higher levels of commitment than people with low levels of initiative. Similarly, over-qualified young people who are involved in career-enhancing strategies showed smaller decreases in job satisfaction than less involved young people. All these results suggest some individual and organizational strategies to cope with the detrimental effects of deprivation provoked by OQ.

Third, the research described above provides support for using a person-centric approach to understand and explain the consequences of underemployment (Peiró et al., 2015). Individuals give meaning to OQ based on their experiences and background. Thus, their reasons for accepting a job below their level of qualification are relevant in analysing the consequences of OQ. Being overqualified in a job while studying, previous over-qualification, the perceived level of employability, and general self-efficacy are found to moderate the relationship between OQ and job satisfaction and turnover intentions. In the same vein, expectations about a future job match or perceived job insecurity are relevant variables for understanding the consequences of OQ. Finally, labour market conditions and previous work experience can play a role. In certain conditions, a resignation effect could appear when faced with persistent OQ. A labour market with scarce job opportunities could influence the way over-qualified people perceive the person-job mismatch, that is, as an opportunity to avoid other undesired job features, as an exchange for balancing this mismatch, or as a trap when remaining for a long time.

### Over-Qualification Throughout the Career Path

The third avenue of OQ research carried out at IDOCAL addresses the evolution of OQ across the different positions occupied by young people in their career's first years. Individuals can have different motives for accepting a job for which they are over-qualified. Some motives are considered instrumental to a future career (gaining experience or competencies, developing human capital and contacts, etc.), viewing OQ as a stepping-stone in the general framework of one's career (Baert et al., 2013). Thus, individuals may start their careers over-qualified, but they will achieve a matched job in the short- or medium-term. However, individuals might accept being over-qualified for other reasons, mainly to avoid other not-preferred features (geographical mobility, undesired time schedules, etc.) or simply to escape unemployment. In such cases, OQ could be a real trap for a large proportion of over-qualified young people because they would find it difficult to access to better- matched jobs. To investigate these aspects, different IDOCAL studies analysed how OQ evolves over time in each individual. The reviewed studies considered human capital from the perspective of individuals, initial person-job fit, previous work experience, and the voluntariness of turnover (whether or not people voluntarily leave the job for which they are over-qualified), as variables that could influence whether OQ is a stepping-stone strategy or a trap for over-qualified people.

González-Romá et al. (2015) tested whether some indicators of human capital predicted vertical fit and the change in vertical fit over an eight-year period, in a three-wave panel design using surveys four and eight years after graduation. Whereas a measure of perceived general competences did not predict vertical fit, a more professional and practical-oriented instruction predicted vertical fit and a more rapid change to a better fit. Graduates who received more practical-oriented instruction during their studies showed a faster track to a fitted job than graduates who received a less practical orientation.

Hernández et al. (2011) analysed changes in OQ in young

people who had had more than one job, considering whether quitting previous jobs was done voluntarily or involuntarily. They hypothesized that employees who quit their jobs voluntarily have a better chance of getting a job that fits their qualification. In this case, accepting a job for which one is overqualified could be just a 'steppingstone' to getting a better job. By contrast, employees who involuntarily leave their jobs can be expected to have less chance of getting a job that fits their educational level, especially when they have been objectively overqualified for a long time. Results showed that OQ in the first job positively predicted OQ in the latest job, but this relationship was moderated by voluntariness of turnover. When employees changed jobs voluntarily, the levels of OQ in the last job were significantly reduced, compared to the first job levels. In addition, there was a marginally significant three-way interaction effect that included OQ duration. Time spent in over-qualified jobs only mattered for employees who changed jobs voluntarily: the longer the employees remained over-qualified, the smaller the reduction in OQ between the first and last job. Findings support the idea that OQ only serves as a stepping-stone strategy for some over-qualified young people, whereas for many other it is a trap for long time.

Yeves et al. (2013) analysed a sample of Spanish graduates from their initial job after graduation to their job six years after graduation. Their purpose was to understand the relationships between initial job match and final job quality indicators, and the mediating role of job match in the final period. Their findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between the initial job match and the vertical match in jobs six years later. In turn, a vertical match in the last job is related to salary, hierarchical status, and job satisfaction. These results show that starting their career over-qualified has relevant detrimental effects on future job matches and job quality indicators six years later, providing support for the trap hypothesis.

Van der Heijden et al. (2019) adopted a different focus. Their study aimed to test whether working while studying in an area related to their degree affected vertical match, horizontal match, and the hierarchical level after graduation, and whether this relationship was mediated by perceived employability. In addition, dedication to work while studying was considered a moderator in the relationship between the horizontal match while studying and perceived employability. Their results showed that the hierarchical level and job match (vertical and horizontal) after graduation were related to horizontal match in the job held while studying. Moreover, this effect was partially mediated by perceived employability. Unlike in the previously cited studies, this study finds partial support for the stepping-stone hypothesis: when previous jobs allow future graduates to acquire qualifications related to their intended areas of interest, future OQ can be reduced. Nevertheless, not all job experiences serve as an escape from future OQ. In light of this evidence, OQ is only useful as a stepping-stone strategy when the job performed provides relevant qualifications.

Finally, a recent study by Valls et al. (2020) analysed career planning and its effects on OQ. In this case, proactive personality and core self-evaluations are considered key aspects in shaping career strategies leading to a job match. Proactive personality (stable personal disposition to take initiative to change the environment in a wide range of situations) that could lead young people to plan their future careers and find a better fitted job. Core self-evaluations (a composite construct of self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism that reflects beliefs about one's capacities and competence) had been considered a key aspect in elaborating coping strategies for work and career difficulties. Valls et al.'s study tested two alternative hypotheses

about the relationship between these variables. The motivational approach suggests that people with higher core self-evaluations are more motivated to establish plans to get matched jobs. The relationship between personal initiative and OQ will be stronger in young people with better self-evaluations. Nevertheless, the overconfidence approach suggests that people with higher core self-evaluations will feel excessive confidence, decreasing their career planning efforts. Therefore, the relationship between proactive personality and OQ would be weaker when core self-evaluations are higher. Results showed a negative indirect effect of proactive personality on OQ through career planning. Thus, a proactive individual develops more career plans to achieve better-matched jobs. In addition, this effect was moderated by core self-evaluations, providing support for the overconfidence approach. The relevance of these findings is that, beyond employability, other personal resources are useful for understanding how young people experience their career paths and how these personal resources lead to being over-qualified or matched in a job. In some cases, over-qualification could be the result not only of career strategies (stepping-stone or an alternative to the lack of preferred options) or lacking employability as a psychological resource, but also of an excess of self-confidence.

The aforementioned findings provide some relevant contributions to OQ research. OQ is a frequent phenomenon in most advanced economies, and the figures are persistent. Thus, reducing their negative effects becomes relevant. Because OQ refers to different but related contents (general competencies, years of education, specific skills, soft skills, etc.), it is important to understand who becomes over-qualified and why, and how OQ evolves over time. Our results show that OQ persists for many young people who initiate their careers overqualified (even six or eight years after the first job). Only some overqualified young people advance to a better fit, and voluntary turnover matters. Thus, some young people have opportunities to achieve a matched job, voluntarily quitting jobs for which they are over-qualified. However, OQ is not a good strategy to gain experience or competences to improve the job match. Involuntary turnover was associated with further OQ, showing that many young people had few opportunities for improvement. Work experience while studying seems to influence reducing further OQ only when this experience is closely related to the field of studies. Together, these findings do not support the hypothesis of OQ as a stepping-stone career strategy, as OQ in initial career steps persists. OQ is not only a question of competences. Other variables such as human capital (professional orientation of studies), personal resources (proactive personality, excessive self-confidence), and other mentioned employability dimensions, play a role in explaining which individuals are more likely to be over-qualified and what variables allow them to escape from OQ.

### **Discussion: Some Lessons Learned About Over- Qualification.**

Recent research on employability and OQ at IDOCAL had provided some interesting evidence about the topic on three main points (the nature and antecedents of OQ, how young people make sense of OQ, and whether OQ can be understood as a stepping-stone strategy or a trap for overqualified workers). However, despite this evidence, these questions remain unclear.

In addition to labour market and employment conditions, some personal factors have been mentioned as antecedents of OQ: lack of specific competences, a gap between the education received and the skills acquired (especially if over-qualification is operationalised as over-education), lack of job search skills, work

preferences, values and expectations, and so on. Our research outlines the relevance of employability dimensions in predicting OQ. Whereas general competences do not appear to be a critical issue, other components of human capital have shown their relevance, such as the field of studies, the more professional and practical orientation of the studies, or postgraduate training. Social capital provides greater opportunities to reach a matched job. Work values, work centrality, and career identity increase the chances for a person-job fit. The role of career adaptability is less clear, but employability as a psychosocial resource explains around 17-24% of OQ. In labour markets that offer few job opportunities that match workers' qualification levels, more employable young people have more opportunities for success. Our results outline the relevance of employability and perceived employability as key variables in reducing the likelihood of being over-qualified. Human capital could be considered the main employability dimension, but social networks and social skills, as well as motivational and career aspects are also relevant. Work values (intrinsic and extrinsic), preferred job features, career identity, personal initiative, and proactivity are personal characteristics that make some young people better equipped to face a scarcity of matched jobs.

Second, there is a strong consensus about the detrimental effects of OQ on job satisfaction, attitudes, and well-being. Its effects on performance (in-role and extra-role) are less clear because productivity is related to both qualifications and motivation. Over-qualified people are often more competent at work than people in the same jobs with the required level of qualifications. However, their motivation is not guaranteed because they feel deprived of desired job features. Our findings suggest that some variables, such as interactional justice, could compensate the lack of desired outcomes (autonomy, responsibility, opportunities to use and acquire skills) associated with OQ. Other personal characteristics could replace the demotivating effect of OQ, such as personal initiative or career-enhancing strategies. If young people make plans and have expectations of obtaining a matched fit, the decrease in job satisfaction and performance could be negligible. In addition, our findings suggest that people make sense of being over-qualified based on their own work values, past experiences, and their awareness of labour conditions. Job insecurity, intrinsic and extrinsic work values, preferences for flexibility, perceived employability, general self-efficacy, or previous experiences of OQ affect the meaning young people give to OQ and its consequences. It provides support to the person-centric approach to OQ (Peiró et al., 2015, p.99): "Underemployment need to be studied taking into account individuals' biography construction, life projects, and the actions individuals can take to prevent, cope with, or improve these typically undesirable situations. Of course, the actions taken will depend on more macro contextual factors, such as unemployment policies and programs. These macro strategies interact with micro-level ones (implemented by individuals and, perhaps, their families), not only to reduce the incidence of the phenomena, but also their negative consequences, enhancing the positive ones. Both levels may in fact influence each other, with different results in different contexts".

Finally, one of the critical points related to OQ is its evolution over time and alternative hypotheses of OQ as a stepping-stone or as a trap. Our findings, although not conclusive, suggest that, for most young people, OQ is more of a trap than a stepping-stone strategy to gain experience, human capital, or social capital. For a significant proportion of young people, entering the labour market over-qualified implies remaining OQ many years later. Previous experience as an over-qualified worker could lead to resignation, and previous experience only helps to escape from OQ when it is closely related to the field of studies. Only some

over-qualified young people had the opportunity to voluntarily leave their unmatched job to gain job fit. These results call for a more nuanced career orientation for young people entering the labour market because initial job experiences have long-term consequences. Entering a job that is beneath one's level of qualifications, although it avoids unemployment, could trap the individual in a long experience of underemployment.

The cross-sectional design of most of the research summarised in the previous pages calls for caution when interpreting the results. Nevertheless, some of the contributions could guide future studies on this topic. OQ seems to be a challenging and critical issue for the future, especially considering the turbulence COVID-19 is provoking in the economic and labour markets. Preventing OQ, providing career counselling, developing employability and coping strategies for over-qualified people, and disentangling the variables that moderate the relationship between OQ and its consequences (especially job attitudes and outcomes) should be a priority for work psychologists in the coming years.

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