

### **Abstract**

The overall aim of this research is to investigate perceived over-qualification (PoQ) and its consequences, namely 3 specific information-sharing-related counterproductive work behaviours: silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping. The research model is constructed using relative deprivation and anger emotion as mediators, and self-regulatory focus as moderator. The research model, constructed with 8 variables, is tested using the data gathered from 188 valid responses to a quantitative survey. An overall positive effect is found between PoQ and knowledge withholding; the positive relationship of PoQ and anger is mediated by relative deprivation, while relative deprivation and anger serve as serial mediators between PoQ and negative gossiping. Prevention focus moderates the relationship between PoQ and relative deprivation, and a significant moderated mediation effect of PoQ on silence is discovered when using prevention focus as a moderator and relative deprivation as a mediator for a specific range of prevention focus.

### **Key words:**

Perceived over-qualification, counterproductive work behaviour, silence, knowledge withholding, negative gossiping, relative deprivation, anger, prevention focus, promotion focus

### **Perceived Over-Qualification and Retaliative Work Behaviour? Testing the Mediating Role of Relative Deprivation and Anger Emotion and the Moderating Role of Regulatory Focus**

Due to changes in the economy and the workforce, as well as improved education levels, an increasing amount of people settle into jobs that they need but for which they may be highly overqualified (Erdogan, Bauer, Peiró, & Truxillo, 2011). According to the review from Erdogan et al. (2011), concern regarding over-qualification abounds the world over, and has not only been reported in developed countries such as Canada (e.g. Frenette, 2000) and European countries (Büchel & Mertens, 2004; García-Montalvo & Peiro, 2008), but also in developing countries (Görg & Strobl, 2003). This subject is drawing greater attention from scholars, practitioners, and the mass media (see, for example, Erdogan et al., 2011; Maynard & Feldman, 2011; Liu, Luksyte, Zhou, Shi, & Wang, 2015).

Over-qualification describes situations in which individuals are equipped with higher levels of education, skills, and/or experience than the requirements of the current position that they are engaged in (Erdon & Bauer, 2011). It has also been a frequently researched topic in vocational science research concerning underemployment over the last two decades. Contrary to *objective* over-qualification, which describes the actual discrepancies between the education, skills, and/or experiences with which individuals are equipped and the ones required by the current job, this current research focuses on perceived over-qualification (hereafter referred to as PoQ) – the awareness of this discrepancy by the individual – in order to better understand its outcomes, such as the psychological, emotional and work behavioural impact upon the individual.

Existing studies have shown the presence of a certain degree of ‘mixed findings’ about whether employees’ self-perceptions of over-qualification will result in negative work outcomes or not. While the results of a majority of research have suggested negative findings, such as poor work attitudes (Burris, 1983; Johnson, Morrow, & Johnson, 2002; Maynard, Joseph, & Maynard,

2006), high turnover intentions (Verhaest & Omey, 2006), low career satisfaction (Erdogan, Tomás, Valls, & Gracia, 2018), and greater psychological distress (Jonson & Jonson, 1996), the relationship between PoQ and employees' behaviour(s) is still poorly understood: researchers did not find any significant relationship between PoQ and task performance (Harari, Manapragada, & Viswesvaran, 2017; Skowronski, 2019); the relationship between PoQ and counterproductive work behaviour (hereafter refer to as CWB) is understudied according to review from Liu and Wang (2015). To date, there has only been a handful of tested research studying PoQ and CWB (Liu et al., 2015; Schreurs, Jawahar, & Akkermans, 2019; Bickes, Yilmaz, Samur, & Demirtas, 2019, etc.), which has consistently found that over-qualification has a positive effect on counterproductive work behaviours. However, all of the above-mentioned studies have studied CWB as a result of PoQ in a broad and generic manner, which indicates more in-depth studies are required in this field. The research presented here is going to contribute to this field by continuing to bridge this gap in the knowledge pertaining to the relationship between PoQ and CWB, as well as identifying and focusing on three specific types of CWB: silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping. These three behaviours are all related to the counterproductive sharing of information within an organisation. There are multiple reasons for the selection of information sharing-related CWB as the focus of this research: first, managing knowledge inventories is a highly important issue for the knowledge-based view of a firm due to the fact that, when facing conditions of uncertainty, firms need to be flexible if they are to react rapidly to unknown circumstances (Miller, 2002); second, previous CWB studies have mainly focused on manual workers, with researchers seldom focusing on knowledge workers with regard to behaviours such as knowledge withholding (Raelin, 1984; Raelin, 1994); third, besides being silent or withholding knowledge, some employees go even further by negatively sharing information (gossip), which damages professional reputations and could result in unfounded disciplinary measures (Sitzman,

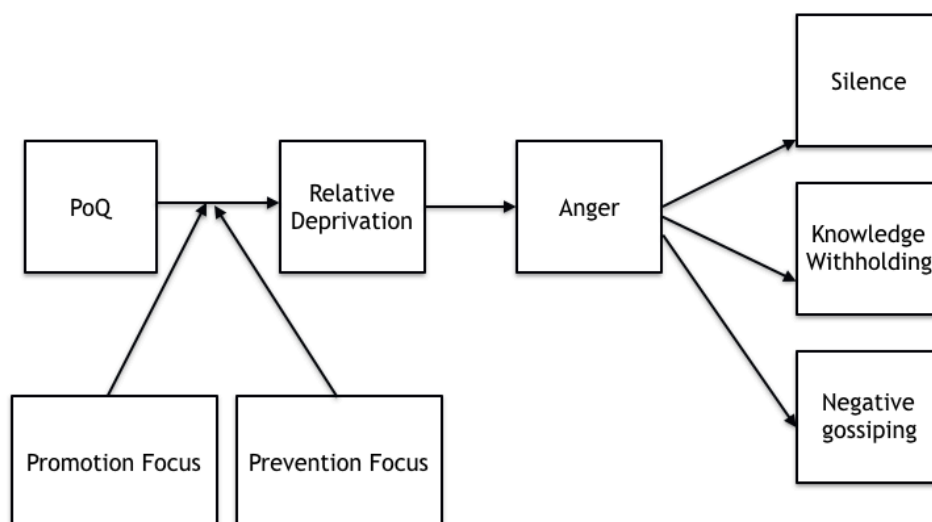
2006).

What is the reason for PoQ employees' engaging in CWB? According to the review of Erdogan et al. (2011), relative deprivation is the most commonly cited explanation for the effects of perceived over-qualification. The definition from Crosby (1976) dictates that when individuals feel they want – and also are entitled to – certain outcomes but are unable to access them, while others with similar circumstances are able to, they will feel unfairly treated and deprived. Relative deprivation is commonly applied as the theory to explain PoQ, but to date only three publications have empirically tested its mediating role between PoQ and its outcomes (Feldman, Leana, & Bolino, 2002; Erdogan et al., 2018; Schreurs et al., 2019). Additionally, a recent study from Schreurs et al. (2019) called for the introduction of an emotion factor as a mediator, in order to further refine the causal chain between relative deprivation and negative outcomes, and in response to this, the research model constructed here will incorporate the emotion of anger as another mediator.

Do all PoQ employees engage in CWB in the same way, and with the same magnitude? A recent review from Skowronski (2019) indicated that the negative effects of PoQ that have been studied to date are not universal, and that these negative effects are moderated by different individual, situational and organisational variables. For instance, individuals who intentionally opted for employment in an overqualified position with the aim of optimising their personal work-life balance will perceive fewer negative effects upon themselves. Researchers have tested PoQ and its outcomes using different moderators, including external factors such as empowerment (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009), organisational learning (Zheng & Wang, 2017) and power distance (Harari et al., 2017), while recent studies have also included some individual motivational variables as moderator, such as ambition (Schreurs et al. 2019), career centrality (Erdogan et al. 2018) and justice sensitivity (Liu et al., 2015). Throughout historical developments in motivation theory, the

importance of people's self-regulatory focus has been emphasised as a central component shaping their motivations and behaviour (Higgins, 1997, 1998). From an individual psychological point of view, perceived over-qualification and self-regulatory focus have something in common, namely a reference point - the current situation. Self-perceived over-qualified employees view their own qualification (education, skills and experiences) as being higher than the current job's requirements or the extent to which those qualifications can be utilised in the current job, while self-regulatory focus theory depicts individuals as being more motivated by striving for a better future compared to the current situation (promotion focus) or, to the contrary, by avoiding a worse situation than current one (Higgins, 1998). Individuals with different regulatory focus (promotion or prevention) react to PoQ differently. To date, there has been no empirically tested study confirming (or refuting) the moderation role of regulatory focus on PoQ and its outcomes. This thesis contributes to the corpus of PoQ research by studying this novel moderator to explain when and how PoQ leads to a certain CWB outcome(s).

To be able to address the above needs, a research model has been constructed and empirically tested in order to **find the causal effect of PoQ and CWB** through the mediating role of relative deprivation and anger, moderated by self-regulatory focus. The research model is depicted in figure 1.



**FIGURE 1: RESEARCH MODEL**

## Theory and Hypothesis Development

### PoQ and information sharing-related CWB

As outlined above, the causal relationship between PoQ and CWB is understudied, furthermore, existing studies (Liu et al., 2015; Schreurs et al., 2019; Bickes et al., 2019) have been limited to exploration of CWBs in a general sense; refined studies about specific CWBs in the context of PoQ are lacking. In this section, I will explore the three specific information sharing-related CWBs: silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping, where employees' behaviours range from being passive (silence) to relatively more active (negative gossiping).

Silence is defined as “the withholding of ideas, suggestions, or concerns about people, products, or processes that might have been communicated verbally to someone inside the organization with the perceived authority to act” (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino, & Edmondson, 2009). The effects of employee silence can be harmful to the organisation: it reduces the visibility of critical information to management, such as that relating to problems in the inception phase, limits input pertinent to continuous improvement, and reduces innovation. Indirectly, the effect can also be harmful to the wellbeing of employees themselves, as they are subjected to (avoidable) psychological stress (Tangirala, & Ramanujam, 2008).

According to Bell's (1973) post-industrial society forecasting, we are living in an economy that is increasingly dependent on knowledge and innovation, and this emergent high-skilled economy needs knowledge workers as its vanguard. The term 'knowledge workers' refers to those who apply theoretical and analytical knowledge acquired through formal education to the development of new products or services, and who require continuous learning (Drucker, 1999; Peng, 2012). Knowledge management (KM) and knowledge sharing are often hailed as the key to organisational success in the information age (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012)

and in this high-skilled economy. Withholding knowledge is defined as the likelihood that an individual will give less than their full effort in contributing knowledge (Lin & Huang, 2010), or, alternatively, as knowledge hiding – an intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another individual (Connelly et al., 2012). Knowledge withholding is harmful to organisations as it interrupts the information flow within the organisation, and as a result prevents innovation (Kang, 2016) and reduces organisational productivity.

Research data gathered in the United States and Western Europe suggests that over 90% of the workforce engages in at least some form of gossiping activities in the workplace (Grosser, Kidwell, & Labianca, 2012). Workplace gossip is defined as informal and evaluative talk in an organisation about a third party of that organisation who is not present (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Although gossip is one of the main mechanisms by which inter-personal relationships are strengthened and acts to reinforce social bonds among the gossipers within the organisation, negative gossiping harms the organisation by victimising the third party (the target of the gossiping), damages relationships, limits work-related success and destroys the psychological sense of belonging. It also generates negative outcomes including disharmony, suspicions, and seeing the worst in other people (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012; Michelson, Van Iterson, & Waddington, 2010).

### **Relative deprivation and anger as mediators**

Relative deprivation describes situations where individuals feel deprived because they believe they are unfairly treated and deserve better when comparing their current accomplishments with those of their contemporaries (Crosby, 1976). It can be easily illustrated by a quote from Karl Marx (1818 - 1883): *“A house may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small, it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut.”*. In the context of PoQ, individu-

als who are equipped with higher education, training, skills or experiences expect a job in which they can utilise their corresponding skillsets; however, if, on the contrary, they are employed to perform a job with lower skill requirements, even if the salary and job conditions are good, they will feel they are deprived of better job opportunities (Erdoan & Bauer, 2009), and as a consequence they **feel injustice and unfairly treated** (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Studies have shown that organisational fairness studies should not only assess the absolute distribution of resources, but also should consider the moods, emotions and affective dispositions of individuals (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007). Since employees spend the majority of their waking time in the work environment, their identity and emotions are closely tied to their jobs and careers (Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2013). For PoQ employees, emotions such as anger can be generated by work-related frustration, due to the fact that they perceive themselves as being unfairly treated by the organisation in relation to their access to a more challenging job and better job opportunities (Fox & Spector, 1999).

In short, based on 4 operating requirements of relative deprivation defined by Smith and Pettigrew (2015), **relative deprivation is applied if PoQ employees make a cognitive comparison of their own circumstances to those of their co-workers, former colleagues, etc.,** perceiving that they are disadvantaged because of skill under-utilisation; this perceived disadvantage leads to a belief in the existence of unfairness, and eventually results in feelings such as anger and frustration.

***Hypothesis 1: Relative deprivation mediates the relationship of PoQ and Anger***

While a majority of studies about organisational CWB focus on validating integrity tests to help Human Resources departments identify and avoid hiring employees with CWB potential; more and more studies are focusing on the actual root causes behind employees' engagement in CWB (Le Roy, Bastounis, & Poussard, 2012). As outlined previously, relative deprivation starts



with cognitive comparisons, which include questions in which people contrast their situation with others, or even themselves at another point in time, these comparisons should predict individual behaviour including deviance (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). Smith et al. (2012) also suggested that all forms of relative deprivation are associated with angry resentment, and an interest in looking for externals to hold responsible. Relative deprived employees can direct their anger emotion towards the organisation or colleagues, as they perceive that the organisation deprived them from better working conditions or opportunities which they feel they deserve to have, and some colleagues (with similar profiles) possess better positions which they are entitled to. As anger is an “attack” emotion (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000) and is directly associated with workplace retaliation, I argue, employees who feel relative deprivation at work will accumulate negative emotions such as anger, and to express the anger emotion, they will retaliate against the organisation or colleagues by engaging in counter productive work behaviours such as silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping.

***Hypothesis 2a:*** Anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and silence

***Hypothesis 2b:*** Anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and knowledge withholding

***Hypothesis 2c:*** Anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and negative gossiping

Past studies have already predicted the mediation role of relative deprivation between PoQ and its outcomes (Feldman et al. 2002; Erdogan et al., 2018; Schreurs et al., 2019), and also mediation role of anger between relative deprivation and its outcomes (Smith et al., 2012). Putting the above research results in sequence and drawing from hypotheses 1, 2a, 2b and 2c, it is logical to argue that the indirect effect of PoQ on information-sharing related counter productive working behaviours should be mediated by relative deprivation and anger sequentially.

**Hypothesis 3a:** PoQ is indirectly related to silence through relative deprivation and anger

**Hypothesis 3b:** PoQ is indirectly related to knowledge withholding through relative deprivation and anger

**Hypothesis 3c:** PoQ is indirectly related to negative gossiping through relative deprivation and anger

### **Regulatory focus as a moderator**

Regulatory focus is a motivation-related theory based on the hedonic principle stating that people are attracted to enjoying pleasure and avoiding pain, the principle can be traced back to as far as Plato's Protagoras (Higgins, 1998). Higgins further outlined the principle that starting from the current perceived self-state, self-regulatory systems have 2 reference values: a positive reference value indicating a perceived desired state, for which an individual is motivated to perform extra in order to pursue, and a negative reference value indicating an undesired, to be avoided end state, which an individual is likewise motivated to perform extra in order to avoid. People who are motivated by approaching the positive reference value are termed 'promotion focused', whereas those who are motivated by avoiding the negative reference value are termed 'prevention focused'. Promotion focused individuals are concerned with advancement, growth, and accomplishment, and their objectives are goals, hopes, ideals and aspirations. Prevention focused individuals are concerned with security, safety, and their objectives are duties, obligations and necessities (Nguyen, 2018).

Proactivity, risk seeking, adapting to challenging assignments and going out of the comfort zones are some of the typical characteristics of promotion focused decision making approach (Gino & Margolis, 2011; Kim, Rao, & Lee, 2009; Cantor, Blackhurst, & Cortes, 2014). That being said, to be able to achieve individuals' goals such as career advancement, growth and accomplishments, with which promotion focused employees are most concerned, they need to be given

challenging work, more responsibilities and opportunities for getting out of their comfort zone. However, as Feldman et al. (2002) pointed out, perceived overqualified employees suffer from their current unsatisfied job conditions such as lack of challenge, opportunity, or responsibility, as those conditions are often beneath what they had expected, experienced, or been promised before, as a result, they feel relatively deprived because they are stuck and not able to realise their dreams regarding advancement, growth and accomplishment. Logically, I argue, under the condition of perceived over-qualification, promotion focused employees will be more relatively deprived than others, in addition, the stronger their desire of advancement, growth and accomplishments are - the more promotion focused they are - the more deprived they will feel.

***Hypothesis 4a:*** The positive relationship between perceived over-qualification and relative deprivation is more pronounced for employees high on promotion focus relative to low on promotion focus.

In contrast, risk adverse, security and obligation are some of the key characteristics of prevention focused decision making approach. Prevention focused employees are comfortable with maintaining status quo, thus they act more carefully and cautiously compared to promotion focused ones (Cantor et al., 2014) in order to avoid some undesired consequences such as making mistakes at work, losing their jobs, being demoted etc. In the context of perceived over-qualification, the prevention focused employees will feel more secured and comfortable if they hold extra qualifications (skills, education and experiences) than the requirement of current job, as it is easier to maintain the status quo. That being said, perceived over-qualification might be considered as an advantage for prevention focused employees, because thanks to the perceived surplus of qualifications in their current work, they feel more confident that negative job related consequences are relatively easier to avoid, indicating that the current job is a 'safety net' and can be perceived as 'comfortable', as a result, the feeling of relative deprivation due to perceived over-qualifica-

tion will be less strong. Logically, I argue that under the condition of perceived over-qualification, prevention focused employees will be less relatively deprived than others, on top of that, the stronger their desire of job security, risk averse and status quo maintenance are - the more prevention focused they are - the less relatively deprived they will feel.

***Hypothesis 4b:*** The positive relationship between perceived over-qualification and relative deprivation is less pronounced for employees with high prevention focus relative to those with low prevention focus.

To sum up, I propose that PoQ employees are more likely to engage in CWBs such as silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping because they feel deprived of the opportunities that they perceive they are entitled to, while the level of promotion focus and prevention focus moderates the relationship between PoQ and relative deprivation. A moderated mediation model is generated by combining the mediating role of relative deprivation in the relationship of PoQ and CWB and the moderating role of regulatory focus in the relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation. This integrated model indicates that the indirect positive relationship of PoQ and CWB mediated by relative deprivation is more pronounced for employees with a high promotion focus and low prevention focus.

***Hypothesis 5a:*** The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and silence that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at higher than at lower levels of promotion focus.

***Hypothesis 5b:*** The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and knowledge withholding that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at higher than at lower levels of promotion focus.

***Hypothesis 5c:*** The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and negative gossip that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at higher than at lower

levels of promotion focus.

**Hypothesis 6a:** The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and silence that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at lower than at higher levels of prevention focus.

**Hypothesis 6b:** The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and knowledge withholding that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at lower than at higher levels of prevention focus.

**Hypothesis 6c:** The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and negative gossip that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at lower than at higher levels of prevention focus.

### Methods

A cross-sectional design has been used in the research survey to gather data for analysis. Participants were recruited from my direct contacts, via social media and through employing a snowballing approach. In total, the research survey received 285 responses within a pre-planned 2-week data gathering period, of which 203 contained completed records, 15 of which did not pass the attention test, leaving a final sum of 188 valid records for processing.

Of the 188 records, the average age is 34.7 years, 112 (59.5%) are male, 75 (39.9%) are female, and 1 indicated gender as X. A majority of the participants have a bachelor degree or higher (95%), work as a non-managerial employee (56.19%) and have a permanent contract (70.93%). The participants covered 18 countries of employment, with the majority working in Belgium (64.16%), followed by China (16.81%) and the United States (4.87%). The respondents cover all functional areas, with 34.07% working in IT, followed by 19.91% in research and development and 10.62% in sales and marketing.

### Measures

***Perceived over-qualification*** is measured by 9 items derived from Maynard et al. (2006), including “My job requires less education than I have”, participants have to choose from a Likert scale of 7 points from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

***Relative deprivation*** is measured by 8 items derived from Buunk et al. (2003) including “I intend to attain more in my career than what I have attained at this moment” also measured by a Likert scale of 7 points from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

***Anger*** is measured by 6 items from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006) such as “I get angry easily” and “I often feel overwhelmed with rage”, participants have to choose from a Likert scale of 7 points from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

***Silence*** is measured by a 5-items scale from Detert and Edmondson (2011), including items such as “I do not speak up about difficulties caused by the way managers and subordinates interact”, participants have to choose from a Likert scale of 7 points from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

***Knowledge withholding*** is measured using 5 items taken from Lin and Huang (2010) including “I contribute less knowledge than I know I can”, participants have to choose from a Likert scale of 7 points from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

***Negative gossiping*** is measured by means of 3 items adapted from Wu et al. (2018), the survey was adapted by altering statements, e.g. “In the past six months, others (e.g., co-workers and/or supervisors) communicated damaging information about me in the workplace” to “I communicate damaging information about others (e.g., co-workers and/or supervisors) in the workplace” to measure the CWB behaviour of the participants instead of others. Participants have to choose from a Likert scale of 7 points from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”.

***Regulatory focus*** is measured by means of 14 items adapted from Lockwood, Jordan and Kunda (2002), out of which, ***promotion focus*** is measured by 7 items including statements such

as “I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations”; *prevention focus* is measured by 7 items such as “I am anxious that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations”. The survey questions were adapted by removing schooling related 4 items, such as “I often worry that I will fail to accomplish my academic goals” to better fit the research context. Respondents were asked to evaluate each item by choosing a number ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 10 (very true of me).

### **Data Analysis Approach**

#### ***Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis***

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of each variable, with a Pearson correlation analysis having been conducted to study the correlation of all variables. As indicated, PoQ is positively correlated with total tenure, relative deprivation, anger, prevention focus and knowledge withholding. relative deprivation is positively correlated with anger, prevention focus, knowledge withholding and silence. Anger is positively correlated with all dependent variables, i.e. knowledge withholding, silence and negative gossiping.

Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations Among the Study Variables*  
(*N*=188)

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Age	34.78	6.83	--										
2	Education	5.76	1.22	-0.075	--									
3	Hierarchy	3.18	1.95	0.245**	-0.040	--								
4	Total Tenure	10.04	7.18	0.928**	-0.197**	0.317**	--							
5	POQ	3.84	1.11	0.124	-0.069	-0.039	0.144*	--						
6	Relative deprivation	4.05	0.94	0.081	-0.139	-0.117	0.107	0.387**	--					
7	Anger	2.80	1.04	-0.011	-0.052	-0.067	0.006	0.146*	0.251**	--				
8	Promotion Focus	6.94	1.49	-0.190**	0.083	0.109	-0.145*	0.119	0.124	-0.125	--			
9	Prevention Focus	5.23	1.41	-0.103	0.007	-0.134	-0.052	0.234**	0.283**	0.278**	0.319**	--		
10	Silence	2.67	1.13	-0.029	-0.062	-0.167*	-0.128	-0.124	-0.198**	-0.166*	-0.133	0.130	--	
11	Knowledge withholding	2.62	1.13	0.035	-0.059	-0.053	0.030	0.234**	0.189**	0.194**	-0.124	0.71	0.394**	--
12	Negative gossiping	2.29	1.12	-0.081	-0.145*	-0.067	-0.101	0.127	0.091	0.223**	-0.207	0.067	0.080	0.164*

*Note.* Educational level: 1 = primary school; 2 = secondary school; 3 = high school; 4 = professional bachelor; 5 = academic bachelor; 6 = master; 7 = master-after-master; 8 = doctorate. Hierarchy: 1 = researcher; 2 = employee; 3 = first level manager; 4 = low-level manager; 5 = mid-level manager; 6 = director; 7 = vice president; 8 = self-employed. POQ = perceived over-qualification;

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### SPSS Process Model Analysis

描述SPSS操作过程

Due to the complexity of this research model, SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2017) was used to conduct various model analyses in 4 steps. First, to test hypotheses 4a and 4b, 2 modera-



tion analyses were conducted using PROCESS MODEL 1 to analyse the moderating role of prevention focus and promotion focus on relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation. Second, 7 simple mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS MODEL 4 to analyse the following hypothesis: relative deprivation mediates the relationship of PoQ and anger (hypothesis 1), anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping (hypothesis 2a, 2b, 2c), additionally, to further explore, I conducted additional analysis to test if relative deprivation mediates the relationship of PoQ and silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping. Third, to test hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c, I conducted 3 PROCESS MODEL 6 analyses in order to inspect the serial mediation role of relative deprivation and anger on PoQ and the 3 output CWBs. Finally, to test the moderated mediation, I conducted 6 different PROCESS MODEL 7 analyses to test whether the relationship between PoQ and CWB – silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping, is mediated by relative deprivation and moderated by prevention and/or promotion regulatory focus (hypotheses 5a, 5b, 5c, 6a, 6b & 6c). All the above analyses included age, educational level, hierarchy and total tenure as co-variants, all variables that defined products are mean centered in SPSS, and the criteria for statistical significance is  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

### *Direct, total and indirect effect*

描述SPSS操作结果

The direct effect and total effect of PoQ on the outcome variables and co-variants are displayed in Table 2. Evidence of significant direct effect of PoQ on relative deprivation is found,  $b = 0.277, p < 0.001$ ; there is also significant direct effect of PoQ on knowledge withholding,  $b = 0.162, p < 0.05$ ; as well as significant total effect of PoQ on knowledge withholding,  $b = 0.198, p < 0.01$ .

The indirect effect of PoQ on anger via relative deprivation is 0.075, 95% CI is 0.017 to

0.148, indicating relative deprivation significantly mediates the relationship of PoQ and anger (hypothesis 1 is significant); the indirect effect of relative deprivation on silence via anger is 0.016, 95% CI is -0.017 to 0.070 indicating anger does not significantly mediate the relationship of relative deprivation and silence (hypothesis 2a is insignificant); the indirect effect of relative deprivation on knowledge withholding via anger is 0.037, 95% CI is 0.001 to 0.086, indicating anger does significantly mediate the relationship of relative deprivation and knowledge withholding (hypothesis 2b significant); the indirect effect of relative deprivation on negative gossiping via anger is 0.051, 95% CI is 0.004 to 0.120 indicating anger significantly mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and negative gossiping (hypothesis 2c is significant); the indirect effect for path PoQ - relative deprivation - silence is 0.061, SE = 0.035 95% CI is -0.002 to 0.135, indicating the mediation role of relative deprivation for the relationship of PoQ and silence is insignificant; the indirect effect for path PoQ - relative deprivation - knowledge withholding is 0.032, SE = 0.024 95% CI is -0.010 to 0.083, indicating the mediation role of relative deprivation for PoQ and knowledge withholding is insignificant; the indirect effect for path PoQ - relative deprivation - negative gossiping is 0.014, SE = 0.030 95% CI is -0.038 to 0.078, indicating the mediation role of relative deprivation for PoQ and negative gossiping is insignificant.

The SPSS MODEL 6 result shows that the indirect effect of path PoQ - relative deprivation - Anger - Silence is 0.004, 95% CI is -0.004 to 0.019 indicating that relative deprivation and anger does not sequentially mediate the relationship of PoQ and silence (hypothesis 3a is insignificant); the indirect effect of path PoQ - relative deprivation - Anger - Knowledge withholding is 0.006, 95% CI is -0.001 to 0.019, indicating relative deprivation and anger does not sequentially mediate the relationship of PoQ and knowledge withholding (hypothesis 3b is insignificant); the indirect effect of path PoQ - relative deprivation - Anger - negative gossiping is 0.012, 95% CI is 0.001 to 0.034, indicating relative deprivation and anger does sequentially mediate the

relationship of PoQ on negative gossiping (hypothesis 3c is significant). All total, direct and indirect effects are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

*Results for Total, Direct and Indirect Effects*

Predictors	Direct effect		Total effect		Indirect effect	
	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	95% CI
<b>DV = Relative deprivation</b>						
R sq = 0.237						
Constant	4.313***	[2.797, 5.828]				
PoQ	0.277 ***	[0.162, 0.393]				
Age	0.004	[-0.047, 0.056]				
Education	-0.093	[-0.200, 0.015]				
Hierarchy	-0.060	[-0.129, 0.009]				
Total tenure	0.006	[-0.045, 0.057]				
PoQ * Prevention	-0.081*	[-0.161, -0.001]				
PoQ * Promotion	0.016	[-0.065, 0.097]				
<b>DV = Anger</b>						
R sq = 0.029						
Constant	2.113*	[0.296, 3.930]	3.017***	[1.284, 4.750]		
PoQ	0.056	[-0.089, 0.201]	0.131	[-0.006, 0.268]	0.075*	[0.017, 0.148]
relative deprivation	0.245	[0.072, 0.418]				
Age	-0.014	[-0.076, 0.047]	-0.017	[-0.080, 0.046]		
Education	-0.010	[-0.140, 0.120]	-0.028	[-0.160, 0.104]		

Hierarchy	-0.021	[-0.103, 0.613]	-0.037	[-0.120, 0.046]
Total tenure	0.010	[-0.051, 0.071]	0.015	[-0.047, 0.077]

**DV = Silence**

R sq = 0.106

Constant	1.756	[-0.389, 3.901]	2.409*	[0.333, 4.484]		
PoQ	0.074	[-0.081, 0.229]	0.129	[-0.019, 0.277]	0.055	[-0.002, 0.124]
relative deprivation	0.212*	[-0.031, 0.393]	0.227*	[0.050, 0.404]	0.016	[-0.017, 0.070]
Anger	0.065	[-0.098, 0.229]				
Age	0.040	[-0.026, 0.106]	0.040	[-0.027, 0.106]		
Education	-0.075	[-0.213, 0.064]	-0.092	[-0.231, 0.046]		
Hierarchy	-0.023	[-0.113, 0.066]	-0.034	[-0.123, 0.055]		
Total tenure	-0.063	[-0.128, 0.001]	-0.062	[-0.127, 0.004]		

**DV = Knowledge withholding**

R sq = 0.085

Constant	1.849*	[0.091, 3.606]	2.382**	[0.683, 4.082]		
PoQ	0.162*	[0.035, 0.290]	0.198**	[0.076, 0.319]	0.035	[-0.006, 0.086]
relative deprivation	0.136	[-0.009, 0.282]	0.173*	[0.031, 0.316]	0.037*	[0.001, 0.086]
Anger	0.104	[-0.030, 0.238]				
Age	0.008	[-0.046, 0.062]	0.008	[-0.047, 0.062]		
Education	-0.020	[-0.133, 0.093]	-0.031	[-0.144, 0.083]		
Hierarchy	0.003	[-0.070, 0.076]	-0.002	[-0.075, 0.071]		
Total tenure	-0.012	[-0.065, 0.041]	-0.011	[-0.064, 0.043]		

**DV = Negative gossiping**

R sq = 0.070

Constant	1.416	[-0.747, 3.578]	2.007	[-0.098, 4.112]		
PoQ	0.115	[-0.042, 0.271]	0.134	[-0.016, 0.284]	0.019	[-0.037, 0.082]

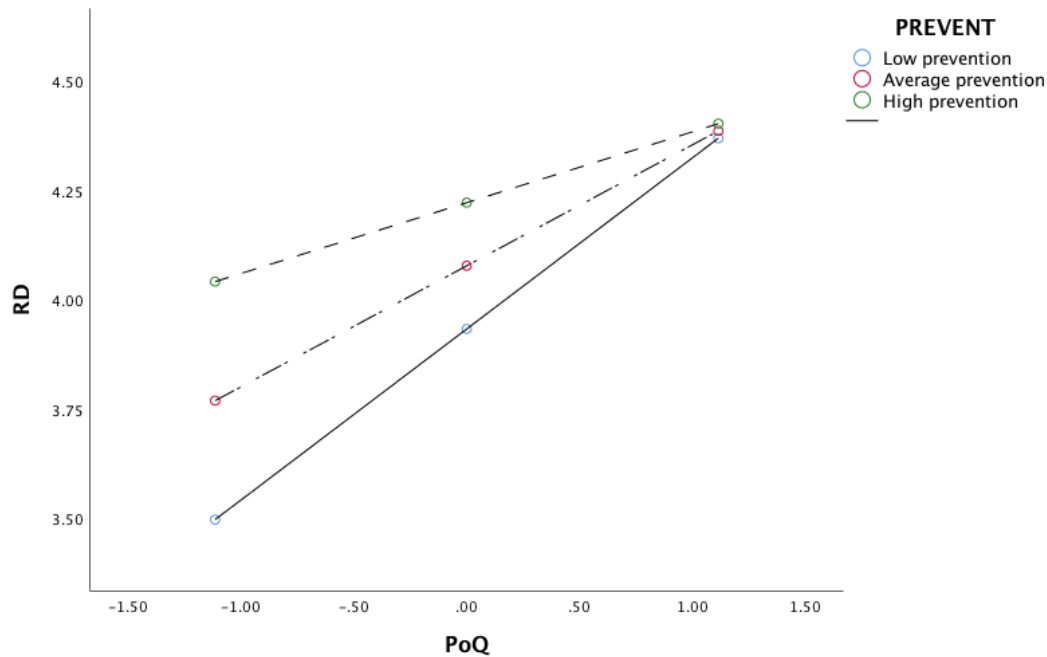
relative deprivation	0.036	[-0.147, 0.219]	0.087	[-0.095, 0.269]	0.051*	[0.004, 0.120]
Anger	0.219**	[0.054, 0.385]				
Age	0.043	[-0.023, 0.110]	0.041	[-0.026, 0.109]		
Education	-0.171*	[-0.310, -0.031]	-0.175*	[-0.316, -0.035]		
Hierarchy	0.003	[-0.086, 0.093]	0.006	[-0.085, 0.096]		
Total tenure	-0.063	[-0.128, 0.003]	-0.062	[-0.129, 0.004]		

*Note.* All variables that define products are mean-centered when running all the model analyses in SPSS. CI = confidence interval \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . The indirect effect of PoQ on silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping is the total indirect effect based on model 6 (using relative deprivation and Anger as serial mediators); the direct, total and indirect effect of relative deprivation on silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping are based on model 4 testing mediating role of anger on the relationship of relative deprivation and the 3 output variables .

#### ***Conditional direct effect of perceived over-qualification***

To test the moderating role of prevention and promotion focus on the relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation, 2 SPSS MODEL 1 analyses were conducted. The result shows that the effect of the interaction of PoQ and promotion focus on relative deprivation is 0.016,  $p = 0.699 > 0.05$  indicating that promotion focus does not moderate the relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation (hypothesis 4a is insignificant); the effect of the interaction of PoQ and prevention focus on relative deprivation is -0.081,  $p = 0.046 < 0.05$  indicating that prevention focus moderates the relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation, the conditional effect interpretation (as depicted in Figure 2) that the more prevention focused an employee is, the less pronounced the positive effect of PoQ on relative deprivation (hypothesis 4c is significant). Furthermore, the Johnson-

Neyman significance regions indicated that the range of prevention focus, which is lower than 6.723 above the mean, significantly moderates the direct effect of PoQ and relative deprivation.



**FIGURE 2: MODERATION EFFECT OF PREVENTION FOCUS ON POQ AND RELATIVE DEPRIVATION**

### *Conditional indirect effect of perceived over-qualification*

To inspect the moderated mediation result of PoQ on the output variables using regulatory focus as moderator, relative deprivation as mediator, SPSS PROCESS model 7 analysis was conducted 6 times. The first 3 analyses were conducted using promotion focus as a moderator and relative deprivation as a mediator to inspect the indirect effect of PoQ on silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping, while prevention focus was added as one of the covariants. The latter 3 analyses were conducted using prevention focus as a moderator to inspect the indirect effect of PoQ on Silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping, while promotion focus

was added as one of the covariants. The result (as displayed in Table 3) shows that the direct effect of PoQ on Silence is 0.093,  $p = 0.237$ , for prevention focus on -1.411 below the mean, the indirect effect of path PoQ - relative deprivation - Silence is 0.089, 95% CI is 0.006 to 0.184 indicating a significant indirect effect; for prevention focus at the mean, the indirect effect of path PoQ - relative deprivation - Silence is 0.063, 95% CI is 0.004 to 0.128, indicating significant indirect effect as well; however for prevention focus of 1.411 above the mean, the indirect effect of path PoQ - relative deprivation - Silence is 0.037, 95% CI is -0.002 to 0.099 indicating an insignificant indirect effect. The fact that there are significant but different indirect effects for different levels of prevention focus indicates that there is moderated mediation effect in this model; however, this is only significant for prevention focus lower than 1.49 above the mean (0), according to the Johnson-Neyman significance region plot (hypothesis 6a is significant for lower range of prevention focus). All other moderated mediation tests give results that are not significant (hypothesis 5a, 5b, 5c, 6b and 6c are insignificant).

Table 3

*Conditional Indirect Effects of Perceived Over-qualification on Silence Through Relative Deprivation at Levels of Prevention Focus (N = 188)*

	Effect	BootSE	95% Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval
Prevention focus			
Low (-1.411 below mean)	0.089*	0.046	0.006 to 0.184
Moderate (equals to the mean)	0.063*	0.032	0.004 to 0.128
High (1.411 above mean)	0.037	0.027	-0.002 to 0.099

*Note.* 5000 bootstrap samples.

The results of all the hypothesis are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

*A Summary of the Test Result of All the Hypotheses*

Hypothesis	Description	Result
H1	Relative deprivation mediates the relationship of PoQ and Anger	Significant
H2a	Anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and silence	Insignificant
H2b	Anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and knowledge withholding	Significant
H2c	Anger mediates the relationship of relative deprivation and negative gossiping	Significant
H3a	PoQ is indirectly related to silence through relative deprivation and anger	Insignificant
H3b	PoQ is indirectly related to knowledge withholding through relative deprivation and anger	Insignificant
H3c	PoQ is indirectly related to negative gossiping through relative deprivation and anger	Significant
H4a	The positive relationship between PoQ and relative deprivation is more pronounced for employees high on promotion focus relative to low on promotion focus.	Insignificant
H4b	The positive relationship between PoQ and relative deprivation is less pronounced for employees with high prevention focus relative to those with low prevention focus.	Significant



H5a	The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and silence that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at higher than at lower levels of promotion focus.	Insignificant
H5b	The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and knowledge withholding that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at higher than at lower levels of promotion focus.	Insignificant
H5c	The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and negative gossip that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at higher than at lower levels of promotion focus.	Insignificant
H6a	The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and silence that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at lower than at higher levels of prevention focus.	Significant
H6b	The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and knowledge withholding that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at lower than at higher levels of prevention focus.	Insignificant
H6c	The indirect relationship between perceived over-qualification and negative gossip that is attributable to relative deprivation is stronger at lower than at higher levels of prevention focus.	Insignificant
Additional test 1	relative deprivation mediates the relationship between PoQ and Silence	Insignificant
Additional test 2	relative deprivation mediates the relationship between PoQ and knowledge withholding	Insignificant
Additional test 3	relative deprivation mediates the relationship between PoQ and negative gossiping	Insignificant

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## Discussion

The purpose of this study was (a) to empirically test the effect of PoQ on 3 specific information-sharing related counterproductive working behaviours, namely silence, knowledge withholding and negative gossiping, (b) to examine the serial mediating role of relative deprivation and anger for PoQ and the 3 outcome variables, (c) to test the moderating role of promotion and/or prevention focus on PoQ and relative deprivation and (d) the moderating role of promotion and/or prevention focus in the indirect link from PoQ to the 3 outcome variables. The result of this research indicates that PoQ predicts anger via relative deprivation, and PoQ does predict one of the counter productive working behaviours - knowledge withholding, however, no mediation is in relative deprivation nor anger was found in their relationship. And as predicted, the indirect relationship of PoQ and negative gossiping is serially mediated by relative deprivation and anger. Additionally, prevention focus acts as a moderator between PoQ and relative deprivation, and it also moderates the indirect relationship between PoQ and silence.

## Theoretical implications

My finding of PoQ predicts counter productive working behaviour (knowledge withholding) is inline with previous findings from Liu et al. (2015), Schreurs et al. (2019) and Bickes et al. (2019), although all previous studies measured counter productive working behaviour in a generic manner. All the above studies empirically found that relative deprivation alone mediates the relationship between PoQ and counterproductive working behaviour, while in my studies, the relative deprivation alone does not mediate the relationship between PoQ and any of the 3 output variables. A meta-analysis from Harari et al. (2017) and a moderated mediation study from Schreurs et al. (2019) already speculated emotion such as anger or frustration resulting from relative deprivation might explain PoQ and its outcomes such as counterproductive behaviours or job

satisfaction. In my findings, adding anger above relative deprivation does (serially) mediate the relationship between PoQ and negative gossiping.

My research results show that PoQ predicted knowledge withholding, but not silence nor negative gossiping, the reason might be that the survey participants have higher-than-average levels of education (with 95% of participants having a bachelor degree or higher) and are employed as knowledge workers, with knowledge withholding apparently being the most effective and commonly used retaliative work behaviour for those participants as a consequence of PoQ.

As predicted, relative deprivation does indeed mediate PoQ and negative emotion, in this case anger. However, the result shows that anger does not mediate relative deprivation and silence, but it does mediate the relationship of relative deprivation and knowledge withholding, as well as the relationship of relative deprivation and negative gossiping. One explanation for this could be that anger is an active emotion (Lewis, 2000), it is logical that anger generates more active retaliatory behaviours such as negative gossiping and deliberate knowledge withholding when compared with silence, which is rather passive, and may instead be mediated by passive emotions such as depression or sadness. The fact that relative deprivation does not mediate PoQ and any of the 3 CWBs indicates some other form of emotional affectation (such as depression or sadness) might be a potential mediator.

Multiple motivational variables were used as moderators to study PoQ and relative deprivation, such as ambition (Schreurs et al. 2019), career centrality (Erdogan et al. 2018) and justice sensitivity (Liu et al., 2015) and have proved their significance in the studies. Continuing the direction of motivational variables as moderator, I found that a novel moderator - prevention focus - moderates the relationship between PoQ and relative deprivation, it also moderates the indirect relationship between PoQ and silence.

The positive relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation is negatively moderated by pre-

vention focus, indicating, in line with my hypothesis, that the employees do consider PoQ as a safety net or comfortable situation which allows avoidance of making mistakes or losing jobs, thus the more prevention focused an employee is, the less they are deprived, in relative terms, under the influence of PoQ. Promotion focus, however, does not moderate the relationship between PoQ and relative deprivation, with one potential explanation for this being the fact that promotion focused employees aim to achieve higher goals, but they consider the absence of PoQ (being able to further utilise their skills) is not enough to achieve their career goals. Another speculation is, the promotion focused employees use current job position as a stepping stone to enter a job market, to expand his network in order to achieve is further career goals.

### **Limitations and Direction for Future Studies**

The cross-sectional sample provides only a snapshot of data, at a single point in time. An advantage of this is the simplicity of undertaking data gathering compared to time-series or longitudinal data gathering. However, cross-sectional data gathering limits the data to being exclusively descriptive of the test result at a specific time, which can be influenced by the participants' situational or emotional conditions; furthermore, it also limits the causal inferences of all variables, thus implicating reverse causal effect among the variables. To confirm the sequential causal chain, it is strongly advised that the study be continued or expanded with a time-series or longitudinal design.

The test results of this research model are derived from the contributions of 285 participants recruited for the quantitative analysis. In spite of the sufficient sample size, diversity of the geographical and citizenship status of the participants (with Belgium, India, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, Spain and Ukraine being among the countries represented) and the diversity of the ages (from 22 to 65), one limitation has been that the participants were not universal enough, as they all fell within the direct or secondary network (colleagues, former colleagues,

classmates, friends, etc.) of the author, hinting to the argument that the industry and study backgrounds are not diversified enough. Hence, it is highly recommended that this study be replicated with different participants.

As described in the discussion section, to investigate the mediation role between relative deprivation and passive retaliative work behaviour such as silence or knowledge withholding, more passive emotional affectations, such as depression and sadness, could be additionally investigated in future studies.

### **Conclusions**

The contribution of this research is multiple: first, the study introduced 2 variables as serial mediators of PoQ and its outcomes to further refine the causal chain; second, it empirically tested the positive effect of PoQ and relative deprivation, and the mediation role of relative deprivation between PoQ and anger; third, by studying more specific CWB variables, it give us greater understanding of PoQ employees and the types of behaviour that can be expected regarding information sharing; fourth, the results show that prevention focus moderates the relationship of PoQ and relative deprivation, giving us a better understanding of the conditional effect of PoQ and its consequences, which can subsequently prove of benefit to human resources researchers in the development of more specific selection criteria.

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