

The Impact Mechanism of Perceived Overqualification on Knowledge Sharing Intention among New Generation Employees

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Abstract: New generation employees generally feel overqualified, but how this impacts their knowledge sharing intention is unclear. This study combines resource conservation theory, self-determination theory, and job crafting theory to create a dual - path model of "perceived overqualification → promotion focus/job crafting → knowledge sharing intention". It also uses innovation climate as a moderating variable to explore organizational situational effects. A structural equation model from 306 new generation employee questionnaires and Bootstrap method for effect testing show: 1 Perceived overqualification indirectly boosts knowledge sharing intention via promotion focus and job crafting, with no direct effect. 2 Innovation climate strengthens perceived overqualification's impact on promotion focus and job crafting, enhancing indirect effects in high - innovation climates. The findings go beyond the "resource shortage" view, offering a way to solve the "high qualifications - low sharing" paradox and giving businesses theoretical and practical guidance for unlocking knowledge potential through innovation climate building.

Keywords: Perceived Overqualification, Knowledge Sharing Intention, Promotion Focus, Job Crafting, Innovation Climate.

1. Introduction

With the continuous deepening of China's higher education policies, the population with advanced academic qualifications has experienced explosive growth, with the proportion of individuals holding master's degrees or above increasing year by year. While educational popularization has fostered widespread high-qualification characteristics among new-generation employees, it has also intensified the structural contradiction of "person-job mismatch." Surveys indicate that an average of 45% of employees across 32 countries perceive their qualification levels as exceeding job requirements, while this figure rises to 84% in China, far surpassing the global average [1]. However, high qualifications have not translated into expected knowledge-sharing efficiency. Driven by the motivation to retain individual competitive advantages, most employees—particularly new-generation workers—are reluctant to engage in knowledge sharing [2]. This paradox highlights a critical organizational management challenge: How to activate knowledge-sharing willingness when individuals remain in prolonged states of underutilized capabilities? Centered on the conceptual framework of perceived overqualification, this study reveals its dual-path mechanism of influencing

knowledge sharing through promotion-focused regulatory focus and job crafting, offering theoretical foundations and practical insights for resolving the "high qualifications-low sharing" dilemma.

Research on knowledge sharing antecedents has moved from a focus on ability to motivation. Some scholars highlight the key role of learning ability and knowledge absorption ability [3,4], and trust and reciprocity norms from a social exchange perspective also significantly impact knowledge sharing [5,6]. In recent years, the introduction of self-determination theory has deepened research on motivation, confirming the synergy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [7,8]. Existing studies show knowledge sharing intention drivers can be grouped into three categories: individual psychology, organizational context, and interactive relationships. At the individual level, intrinsic motivation strongly positively affects knowledge sharing intention [9]. At the organizational level, psychological safety climate and leadership styles directly or indirectly boost knowledge sharing [10-12]. At the interactive level, workplace friendship and team exchange relationships enhance sharing willingness by strengthening social capital [13,14].

However, existing research has long focused on the negative behavioral mechanisms in "resource-deficient" situations. For example, Connelly et al. proposed the knowledge-hiding model, which emphasizes that employees may refuse to share knowledge due to a lack of ability or motivation [15], leading to management paradigms centered on "compensatory incentives." This imbalance has caused two major research gaps: Firstly, current models fail to reveal the behavioral logic of highly qualified employees, especially when they perceive their education and skills to surpass job requirements. In such cases, knowledge sharing may shift from "passive compensation" to "active investment," but the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms underlying this transformation remain unclear [16]. Secondly, despite recruiting many highly educated individuals, companies still use incentive methods based on the "resource-deficiency" assumption, resulting in reduced management effectiveness. For new-generation employees, whose career values emphasize self-actualization and innovation [17], traditional incentive measures grounded in "resource compensation" logic may not suit their needs [18]. Notably, new-generation employees have a higher need for autonomy and an innovative atmosphere [17], and their knowledge-sharing behaviors are more influenced by intrinsic motivation and the work environment [18,19]. This offers a key perspective for understanding the role of perceived overqualification: new-generation employees might transform surplus ability into knowledge-sharing motivation by proactively adjusting work cognition or redefining task boundaries.

While individual-level intermediary mechanisms have been partially explained, the contingent effects of organizational context have not been fully integrated into systematic analysis frameworks. This gap weakens the precision of theoretical guidance for management practice. Research shows that employee behavior results from the dynamic interaction of personal traits and organizational environment [20]. The context-dependent behavioral differences suggest that ignoring the regulatory role of organizational ecology may trap theoretical models in "over-universality", making it hard to clarify the knowledge-sharing effectiveness differences of the same perceived overqualification across organizational contexts. Innovation climate, as an organizational shared cognition supporting innovation, likely regulates the transmission path of perceived overqualification through two mechanisms. First, a high-innovation climate enhances employees' positive interpretation of overqualification via psychological empowerment. Second, institutionalized knowledge-management platforms reduce sharing costs, facilitating job crafting. However, most existing studies treat innovation climate as an independent antecedent variable, leaving its regulatory mechanisms unexplored. This theoretical gap causes a management paradox where enterprises fail to activate highly qualified employees' knowledge potential despite heavy investment in innovation infrastructure. This phenomenon urgently requires in-depth research on the regulatory role of organizational context to resolve it.

2. Theoretical foundations and research hypotheses

2.1. Perceived overqualification and knowledge sharing intention

Conservation of resources theory indicates individuals reinvest resources to maintain or boost their current resource levels [21]. Prior studies often focus on the negative impacts of perceived overqualification [22]. Yet, the generational characteristics of new - generation employees offer a new angle for resource reinvestment: they are more likely to see overqualification as "untapped potential" rather than a psychological burden [23]. This proactive behavior reflects the "resource gain spirals" in conservation of resources theory [21]. When employees gain colleagues' recognition or leaders' attention through knowledge sharing, the enhanced professional reputation can translate into more collaboration chances or promotion opportunities. These new resources not only compensate for the initial "overqualification" but also strengthen self - efficacy, driving continuous knowledge - sharing. Thus, this study proposes:

H1: New - generation employees' perceived overqualification positively affects their knowledge - sharing intention.

2.2. Self - determination theory and promotion focus

Self - determination theory states that intrinsic motivation drives behavior [24]. Regulatory focus theory differentiates between promotion and prevention foci. Perceived overqualification may enhance promotion focus by inspire self - verification needs [25]. When employees feel overqualified, they seek knowledge - sharing opportunities to prove their worth [26]. Research shows employees with strong promotion focus view surplus ability as a "stepping stone" for career growth, gaining organizational recognition through knowledge sharing [27]. For new - generation employees, whose career values emphasize self - actualization and innovation [17], intrinsic motivation combines with promotion focus to transform perceived overqualification from a psychological burden into a driver of knowledge sharing. Thus, the hypotheses are:

H2a: Perceived overqualification significantly positively affects promotion focus among new - generation employees.

H2b: Promotion focus significantly positively affects knowledge - sharing intention.

H2c: Promotion focus mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and knowledge - sharing intention.

2.3. The mediating role of job crafting

Job crafting theory suggests employees optimize their work experience through task adjustment, relational reconstruction, and cognitive reframing [28]. Perceived overqualification may drive job crafting. Overqualified employees might take on knowledge - sharing duties to address the person - position mismatch [19]. Job crafting can also ease the negative emotions from perceived overqualification and enhance sharing intention by boosting job autonomy [29]. This is particularly evident among new - generation employees, who tend to redefine their roles through proactive behavior [30]. Hence, the hypotheses are:

H3a: Perceived overqualification significantly positively impacts job crafting among new - generation employees.

H3b: Job crafting significantly positively impacts knowledge - sharing intention.

H3c: Job crafting mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and knowledge - sharing intention.

2.4. The moderating role of innovation climate

Innovation climate, employees' shared perception of organizational support for innovation, exerts a moderating effect through empowerment and cost - reduction mechanisms. In organizations with a strong innovation climate, psychological empowerment, such as granting decision - making rights and encouraging trial and error, enables employees to convert surplus ability into innovative projects. This positive cognition inclines employees toward a promotion focus, transforming surplus ability into innovation and achieving value via knowledge sharing [31]. Additionally, institutionalized knowledge - management platforms lower sharing costs, facilitating job crafting [32]. Under a strong innovation climate, the "resource gain spirals" effect of promotion focus and job crafting is significantly strengthened. Based on this, the hypotheses are:

H4a: Innovation climate positively moderates the impact of perceived overqualification on promotion focus.

H4b: Innovation climate positively moderates the impact of perceived overqualification on job crafting.

H4c: Innovation climate positively moderates the mediating role of promotion focus and job crafting between perceived overqualification and knowledge - sharing intention. That is, the higher the level of innovation climate, the stronger the indirect effect of the mediated path.

Based on the theoretical analysis and hypothesis development above, this study constructs the conceptual model shown in the figure below.

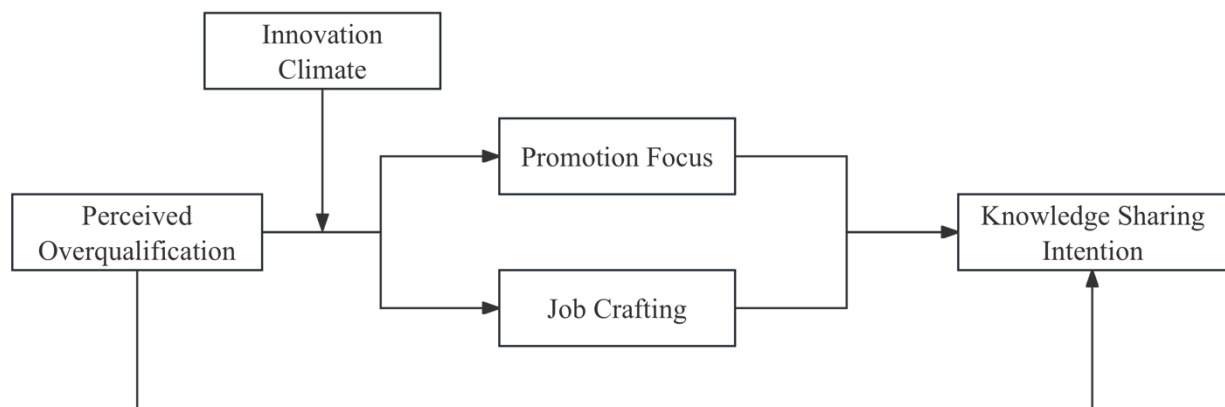


Figure 1: Theoretical model

3. Research design

3.1. Research objectives and variable determination

This study aims to explore the relationships between perceived overqualification, innovation climate, job crafting, regulatory focus, and knowledge sharing intention, as well as their impacts on organizational outcomes. After reviewing relevant literature, these five key variables were identified as the core of the research. The questionnaire is divided into five parts, each corresponding to one variable, with items arranged based on the selection criteria mentioned above. A Likert seven - point scale is used for items to allow respondents to clearly express their attitudes and feelings. Additionally, the questionnaire collects respondents' basic demographic information (e.g., gender, age, education, occupation) to facilitate subsequent data analysis and control for potential confounding factors.

3.2. Measures for hypothesized variables

Perceived Overqualification: This construct refers to employees' perception of having education, experience, and skills exceeding job requirements. Following Maynard et al. [33], initial items were developed, including "The education required for my work is lower than what I have."

Promotion Focus: Based on the work regulatory focus (WRF) scale by Neubert et al. [34], promotion focus was measured through items like "I take risks at work to maximize my promotion opportunities."

Job Crafting: Using Petrou et al. 's [35] 8 - item scale, job crafting was assessed with items such as "I actively seek work - related advice from supervisors and colleagues."

Knowledge - Sharing Intention: Drawing on Bock et al. [36], items like "I will gain promotional credit from my knowledge sharing" were selected.

Innovation Climate: Using Liu et al. 's [37] innovation climate scale adapted to the Chinese context, innovation climate was measured with items such as "The company advocates new attempts and learning from mistakes."

This study assessed the reliability and validity of the scales using Cronbach's α , composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), factor loadings, and confirmatory factor analysis. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's α and CR values exceeded 0.8, and the KMO value was above 0.7, indicating good reliability. For convergent validity, all factor loadings were above 0.6, and AVE values for each variable surpassed the 0.5 threshold. The five - factor model showed better fit than single - to four - factor models, confirming good discriminant validity.

Table 1: Scale measurement indicators, reliability, and convergent validity testing

Variables	N of Items	Factor Loading Range	Cronbach's α	KMO	AVE	CR
Perceived Overqualification	4	0.717~0.782	0.838	0.813	0.567	0.839
Promotion Focus	4	0.737~0.860	0.873	0.825	0.639	0.876
Job Crafting	3	0.791~0.906	0.896	0.734	0.751	0.900
Knowledge Sharing Intention	3	0.757~0.824	0.826	0.715	0.616	0.828
Innovation Climate	5	0.760~0.899	0.909	0.883	0.671	0.911

4. Empirical analysis

According to Pearson correlation analysis, perceived overqualification is positively correlated with promotion focus ($r = 0.346$, $P < 0.01$), job crafting ($r = 0.408$, $P < 0.01$), and knowledge-sharing intention ($r = 0.378$, $P < 0.01$). Promotion focus and job crafting are also positively correlated with knowledge-sharing intention ($r = 0.488$, $P < 0.01$ and $r = 0.546$, $P < 0.01$, respectively), aligning with the initial hypotheses.

This paper uses Amos 24.0 to construct a structural equation model to test the relationships between perceived overqualification, promotion focus, job crafting, and knowledge-sharing intention, and to verify the research hypotheses.

The model fit indices are as follows: CMIN/DF is 1.746, within the range of 1-3; RMSEA is 0.049, within the excellent range of less than 0.05. Additionally, NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, and CFI all reach excellent levels above 0.9. Thus, the SEM model has a good fit and can be used for standardized coefficient interpretation.

The path coefficients from the structural equation model are shown in Table 2. The standardized path coefficient for "perceived overqualification $\rightarrow$ knowledge-sharing intention" is 0.112, with

$p > 0.05$, indicating no significant positive effect, so H1 is not supported. The standardized path coefficient for "perceived overqualification $\rightarrow$ promotion focus" is 0.407, with $p < 0.01$, showing a significant positive effect, supporting H2a. The standardized path coefficient for "promotion focus $\rightarrow$ knowledge-sharing intention" is 0.364, with $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant positive effect, supporting H2b. The standardized path coefficient for "perceived overqualification $\rightarrow$ job crafting" is 0.466, with $p < 0.01$, showing a significant positive effect, supporting H3a. The standardized path coefficient for "job crafting $\rightarrow$ knowledge-sharing intention" is 0.460, with $p < 0.01$, indicating a significant positive effect, supporting H3b.

Table 2: Standardized regression path coefficients

Paths	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	STD. Estimate
POQ $\rightarrow$ KSI	0.125	0.078	1.610	0.107	0.112
POQ $\rightarrow$ PF	0.367	0.062	5.925	0.000***	0.407
PF $\rightarrow$ KSI	0.449	0.080	5.634	0.000***	0.364
POQ $\rightarrow$ JC	0.571	0.082	6.936	0.000***	0.466
JC $\rightarrow$ KSI	0.418	0.061	6.809	0.000***	0.460

This study uses Amos 24.0 and the Bootstrapping method (with 5,000 iterations) to test mediation effects. Results show that perceived overqualification indirectly affects knowledge - sharing intention through promotion focus, with an effect value of 0.148 ($p < 0.01$). The 95% CI is [0.093, 0.223], excluding 0, supporting H2c. Job crafting also mediates the relationship between perceived overqualification and knowledge - sharing intention, with an indirect effect of 0.214 ($p < 0.01$). The 95% CI is [0.145, 0.301], excluding 0, supporting H3c.

Center the independent and moderating variables to mitigate multicollinearity. Include the interaction term of centered perceived overqualification and innovation climate in the regression equation. Conduct hierarchical regression and PROCESS Model 7 analyses. Results are in Table 3.

Table 3: The moderating role of innovation climate on promotion focus and job crafting

Mediating Variable	Promotion Focus			Job Crafting		
Model	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
POQ	0.346***	0.275***	0.304***	0.410***	0.360***	0.383***
IC		0.266***	0.285***		0.187***	0.202***
POQ*IC			0.222***			0.172**
R ²	0.128	0.192	0.240	0.170	0.202	0.230
Adjusted R ²	0.113	0.176	0.222	0.156	0.186	0.212
F-value	8.774***	11.874***	13.431***	12.297***	12.625***	12.751***

As shown in Model 3 of Table 3, the interaction between perceived overqualification and innovation climate significantly affects promotion focus ($b = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that innovation climate moderates the relationship between perceived overqualification and promotion focus, thus hypothesis H4a is supported. Model 6 reveals a significant interaction effect on job crafting ($b = 0.172$, $p < 0.01$), showing that innovation climate moderates the link between perceived overqualification and job crafting, hypothesis H4b is supported.

Further analysis of the moderated mediation model shows that when innovation climate is low, the indirect effect of perceived overqualification on knowledge-sharing intention through promotion focus is not significant (the 95% confidence interval includes 0). However, as innovation climate improves, this indirect effect increases and remains significant. For job crafting, the moderated

mediation effect is significant both when innovation climate is low and high. These results demonstrate that a stronger innovation climate enhances the mediating role of promotion focus and job crafting.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Research conclusions

This study combines resource conservation theory, self-determination theory, and job crafting theory to explore how perceived overqualification affects knowledge-sharing intention among new-generation employees. It reveals the dual mediating roles of promotion focus and job crafting, and confirms the moderating effect of innovation climate. The empirical analysis leads to the following conclusions:

Perceived overqualification doesn't directly boost knowledge-sharing intention, but it significantly strengthens the latter by activating promotion focus. New-generation employees, driven by self-actualization values, see surplus qualifications as a resource. Through promotion focus, they transform knowledge-sharing into a way to gain social capital and enhance professional reputation, creating a "resource gain spiral". This shows they can turn potential frustration from person-position mismatch into motivation for career growth by adjusting cognitive strategies.

Perceived overqualification drives job crafting, which in turn raises knowledge-sharing intention by expanding job responsibilities and redefining work significance. This indicates that new-generation employees can ease negative emotions from perceived overqualification and convert surplus ability into organizational contributions through proactive behavior, highlighting job crafting as a key adaptive strategy for dynamic role redefinition.

Innovation climate strengthens the impact of perceived overqualification on promotion focus and job crafting. In a highly innovative climate, psychological empowerment enhances the positive interpretation of surplus qualifications, and institutionalized knowledge-management platforms cut sharing costs. This dual mechanism shows that a strong innovation ecosystem can magnify the positive effects of perceived overqualification.

5.2. Theoretical contributions

This study breaks from the Western - dominated generational research paradigm by focusing on China's highly competitive and mobile workplace. It uncovers the behavioral logic of new - generation employees, characterized by "ability potential - proactive adaptation - ecological dependence". The empirical findings offer incremental value to indigenization management theory and advocate for a generational management paradigm shift from "material - driven" to "meaning - driven". The systematic integration of "cognition - behavior - context" in the theoretical model provides a reusable framework for future research and advances knowledge management studies toward a multidimensional interaction perspective. The theoretical developments in the field of knowledge management driven by this study are as follows:

While traditional Conservation of Resources theory centers on defensive behaviors caused by resource scarcity, this study pioneeringly applies the "resource gain spirals" logic to the overqualification context. It reveals employees' proactive investment mechanisms for accumulating social capital and career opportunities through knowledge sharing. This finding addresses COR theory's explanatory gap in resource - rich situations and offers a novel framework for the "high qualification - low sharing" paradox.

Prior studies mostly explore the mediating roles of psychological motivation or behavioral strategies in isolation. In contrast, this study, via a dual - mediator model, demonstrates the synergistic effect of promotion focus and job crafting: the former supplies intrinsic motivation for knowledge

sharing, and the latter transforms it into sustainable behavior. This chain - like mechanism overcomes the limitations of single - mediator models and provides an integrated perspective for comprehending new - generation employees' adaptive strategies.

Innovatively, this study positions innovation climate as a moderating variable, uncovering its role in reinforcing the mediating paths through psychological empowerment and resource support. This conclusion propels the application of contingency theory in knowledge management, proves that a sound organizational ecosystem can systematically enhance individual resource - conversion efficiency, and offers fresh empirical evidence for "individual - context" interaction research.

5.3. Management implications

This study reveals the internal mechanism by which the sense of overqualification among new-generation employees affects their willingness to share knowledge, providing a theoretical basis for solving the corporate dilemma of "high qualifications but low sharing." From a managerial perspective, at the cognitive-driven level, enterprises need to bind knowledge sharing with employees' career development goals, establish non-linear career development paths, incorporate knowledge contribution and cross-team collaboration capabilities into promotion evaluations, reduce rigid control, grant employees autonomy in choosing sharing formats and pacing, strengthen intrinsic motivation through social recognition, align with new-generation employees' demand for autonomy, and enhance the sustainability of promotion-focused regulatory focus; At the behavioral support level, it is necessary to clarify the legitimate boundaries of knowledge sharing within job responsibilities, recognize employees' extra-role knowledge-sharing tasks through performance evaluations, provide time and tool support, leverage technology to develop intelligent knowledge management systems, reduce the cost of sharing behaviors, and break through the "high capability-high inertia" paradox; At the ecological optimization level, it is necessary to alleviate employees' concerns about sharing risks through psychological safety building, define tolerance boundaries for exploratory failures and provide optimization resource support, reduce the triggering probability of prevention-focused regulatory focus, explicitly convert knowledge-sharing outcomes into organizational assets, build cross-functional collaboration platforms, break departmental and hierarchical barriers, utilize digital tools to facilitate knowledge flow, reduce collaboration friction and institutional resistance, systematically improve the organizational-level conversion efficiency of individual resources, thereby comprehensively enhancing corporate knowledge-sharing capabilities, fully leveraging the qualification advantages of new-generation employees, and driving organizational development.

5.4. Research limitations and future directions

Although this study, based on cross-sectional data, reveals variable correlations and mediating/moderation effects, the temporal causality remains unclear. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track changes among new-generation employees, thereby clarifying the dynamic causal pathways. Meanwhile, relying solely on questionnaires for data collection introduces common method bias; it is recommended to integrate multiple methods such as in-depth interviews and behavioral observations to enhance external validity and reliability. While the study focuses on promotion-focused regulatory focus, job crafting, and innovation climate to uncover core mechanisms, variables like emotional regulation are not included. Future work could expand the model by incorporating emotional regulation mechanisms. Additionally, the heterogeneity of perceived overqualification is not explored. Follow-up studies may employ subgroup analyses or multi-level models to examine its effects across diverse contexts. Given that this research is rooted in China's workplace environment, the generalizability of findings is limited. Future studies could explore the

role of perceived overqualification in international organizations within a globalized context, offering insights to support global management practices.

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