

# ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION: THE EFFECTIVE ONBOARDING OF NEW EMPLOYEES

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Organizational socialization, or *onboarding*, is a process through which new employees move from being organizational outsiders to becoming organizational insiders. Onboarding refers to the process that helps new employees learn the knowledge, skills, and behaviors they need to succeed in their new organizations. This process of learning to become an effective organizational member is different from *occupational socialization*, which focuses on learning the norms of one's profession, such as police officer, scientist, or medical professional.

Because employees are increasingly changing jobs to work with new organizations, socialization matters just as much to individuals as it does to companies. A successful organizational socialization process can result in effective employees with positive work attitudes who remain with the organization for a longer time, whereas ineffective socialization can lead to premature departure of employees from their new jobs or to their ineffectiveness on the job, which often restarts the recruitment and selection cycle for the organization, leading to loss of time and resources. Research has shown that the socialization process is important because it affects the adjustment of new employees in terms of their effectiveness, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational withdrawal (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). One of the ways that organizations can help to create engaged employees is through effective socialization.

During organizational socialization, newcomers deal with multiple uncertainties surrounding their new role as an organizational insider as well as the nuances of performing the job itself (Anderson, 2001;

Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Although organizations spend considerable time, money, and effort to recruit, select, and train new employees, newcomers also invest time and effort toward successful organizational membership. This process of mutual influence during socialization is called the *interactionist perspective* (Reichers, 1987). Bauer et al. (2007) noted the following:

Rather than waning in importance over the years, socialization has become more important because individuals are more mobile. In fact, approximately 25% of U.S. workers are currently undergoing organizational socialization (Rollag, Parise, & Cross, 2005), and individuals change jobs an average of 10.2 times over 20 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). (p. 707)

We agree that these numbers emphasize that new employee socialization or onboarding continues to be an ongoing issue for individuals and organizations around the world.

## SOCIALIZATION MODEL

Many factors play a role in successful socialization of new employees. Figure 2.1 summarizes a general model of socialization. We examined these factors under three categories: new employee characteristics, new employee behaviors, and organizational efforts. New employee characteristics, or individual differences between new employees in terms of their background and personality traits, play a substantial role

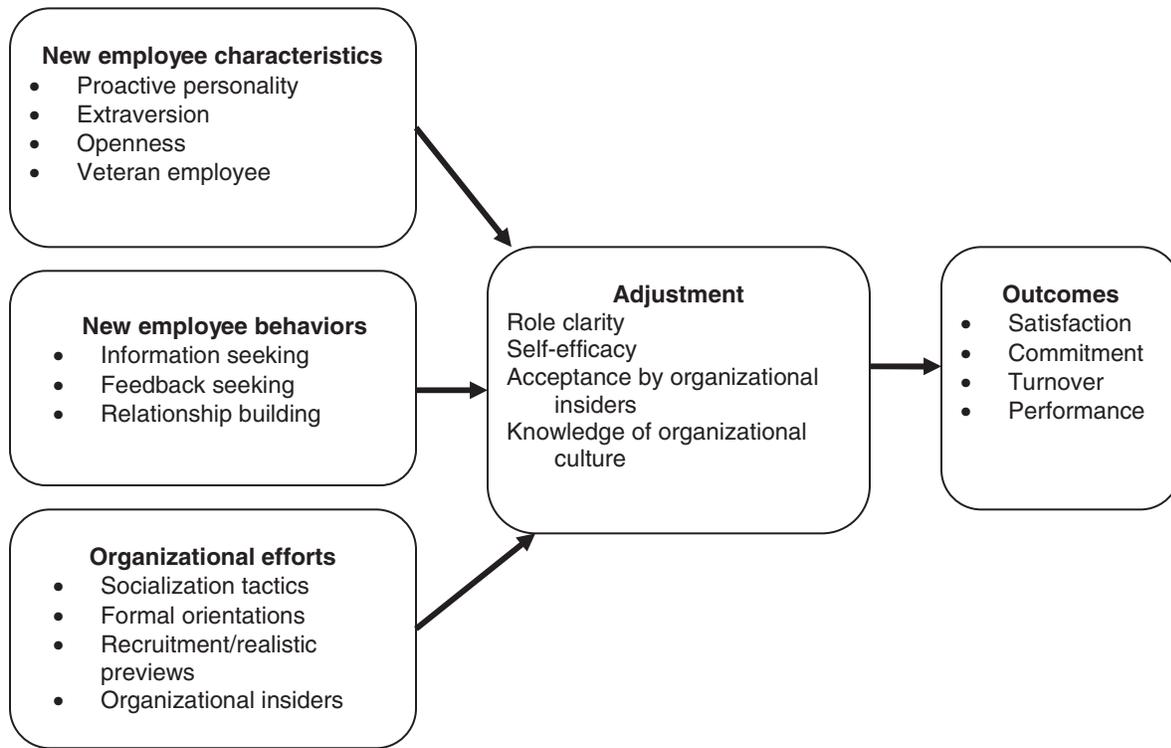


FIGURE 2.1. A summary process model of socialization.

in organizational socialization. (See Vol. 2, chaps. 4 and 5, this handbook.) Moreover, new employees are active participants in the socialization process and engage in behaviors such as seeking information and feedback that quicken the speed of their adjustment. Finally, organizations engage in different activities, such as implementing orientation programs or matching new employees with mentors, that may facilitate organizational socialization.

### New Employee Characteristics

New employee characteristics include proactive personality, Big Five personality traits, and the experience of new employees. The following sections outline the relationship between these factors and onboarding.

**Proactive personality.** Research has shown that employees with certain personality traits and personal characteristics adjust to an organization more quickly (Saks & Ashforth, 1996). Among these personality traits, the foremost is proactive personality. Individuals with proactive personality tend to engage in proactive behaviors such as taking charge (Crant, 2000; Parker & Collins, in press). The effects of

proactive personality on an employee’s career start even before he or she enters the organization, because proactive personality has been related to the success of one’s job search (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006). Because proactive employees have a desire to control their environment, they often demonstrate proactive behaviors that enhance socialization. For example, their motivation to learn (Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006) may translate into behaviors that lead to effective socialization, such as asking a lot of clarifying questions to understand how the company works. Proactive individuals also develop social networks that may help them better understand the organizational culture (Thompson, 2005). Research has shown that proactive personality is related to adjustment variables, such as role clarity, work-group integration, political knowledge, and task mastery, as well as to socialization outcomes (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). For example, individuals high on proactive personality tend to be more satisfied with their jobs and careers (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009). In addition, they tend to have higher levels of performance (Crant, 2000). Finally, individ-

uals with higher proactive personality may be more likely to remain in a position because they are higher on self-efficacy and more invested because of high levels of responsibility on the job (Parker & Sprigg, 1999). However, because of their high performance and networking, they may have more career options, which might make them more likely to leave, but research has not yet addressed this question definitively.

**Big Five factor model.** Research has also demonstrated a link between Big Five personality traits and organizational socialization. Specifically, extraverts and employees who have openness to experience show higher levels of adjustment in their new jobs because of such actions as seeking information, feedback, positively framing new situations as opportunities rather than threats, and building relationships with others (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). For example, in meta-analyses, employees who have high openness to experience have been shown to have higher levels of training proficiency ( $\rho = .25$ , Barrick & Mount, 1991;  $\rho = .26$ , Salgado, 1997), yet engage in more unplanned quitting of their jobs ( $\rho = .25$ , Zimmerman, 2008).

**Experienced new employees.** Finally, experienced employees tend to go through a slightly different adjustment process. Employees who have a lot of job-change experience are able to use their insights from previous jobs to help them adjust to the new company. For instance, when employees take their first permanent jobs after college, their self-reported adjustment into their teams and roles seems to indicate that it is more important for them to demonstrate adequate performance than it is for more experienced employees (Carr, Pearson, West, & Boyar, 2006). For example, Bauer et al.'s (2007) meta-analysis found that the self-efficacy of recent graduates compared with experienced samples is a stronger predictor of job performance (.40 vs. .01) and intentions to remain (.20 vs. .04), whereas social acceptance is more strongly related to job performance (.30) than it is for the more experienced employees (.11).

### New Employee Behaviors

New employees are active participants in the socialization process. In other words, although it is the

organization's job to provide an environment in which new employees quickly adjust to their new roles and understand the company's culture, new employees can also quicken their adjustment by demonstrating the behaviors that help them clarify what is expected of them, learning the values and norms of the organization, and gaining acceptance by their team. More research is needed on relevant behaviors that contribute to employee adjustment, such as how new employees go about acquiring new resources, negotiate their roles, and engage in political behaviors as well as how these behaviors affect employee adjustment and socialization outcomes.

**Information seeking.** Information seeking is a key behavior for new employees that may help them adjust. New employees ask questions about different aspects of their jobs, company procedures, and priorities and take an active role in making sense of their environment. They may also seek information using more passive methods such as monitoring the environment, viewing the company Web site, reading the employee handbook, and reviewing other written literature. However, only limited information regarding the company culture and other unwritten rules will likely emerge from such passive methods. Information obtained from supervisors and coworkers is a key element of learning about one's new environment.

The frequency of active information seeking is related to new employee adjustment and important work attitudes and behaviors (Bauer et al., 2007; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b). The patterns of information seeking from different sources such as supervisors and coworkers are different and change over time. For example, employees tend to reduce their technical information seeking from coworkers, presumably as their expertise increases. Moreover, as time passes, employees start asking more questions of supervisors about what is expected of them and how they are going to be evaluated (Chan & Schmitt, 2000). Some employees might be reluctant to ask questions because certain types of information seeking may have a social cost by creating doubts about the employee's future performance potential and revealing weaknesses. However, by asking questions about norms, expectations, and how things are done within a specific company, newcomers communicate

to others in the organization that they are interested in learning the norms and performing well. Research has also shown that institutionalized approaches to socialization on the part of the organization are needed to a stronger extent for employees who are not seeking information. In other words, even when organizations are not using a structured method of socialization, employees can alleviate the negative effects of lack of institutionalized socialization practices by seeking information (Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006).

**Feedback seeking.** Feedback seeking may also help new employees. New employees often take missteps and may find it challenging to understand and interpret the positive or negative reactions they receive from coworkers. The newcomer lacks an understanding of the unique context of the organization. For example, new employees may not know whether they are performing up to standards or whether it is a good idea to mention a company mistake to their supervisor. By actively seeking feedback, new employees can more quickly learn about any behaviors that need to be modified to understand which behaviors best fit in with company culture and expectations. Research has shown the benefits of feedback seeking for new employee adjustment (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Similar to information seeking, feedback seeking tends to benefit employees even more in the absence of institutionalized socialization on the part of the organization (Gruman et al., 2006). As more and more organizations begin to institute formal onboarding programs, the need for new employees to ask basic questions is lessened. These programs include help desks that new employees can call, online information centers, and regularly scheduled meetings with important organizational stakeholders to make sure the new employee is on track to adjust to the organization.

**Relationship building.** Relationship building (also called *networking*) is the third important behavior new employees may demonstrate. It is important for new employees to facilitate their own socialization by actively building relationships. According to one estimate, 35% of managers who start a new job fail in the new job and either voluntarily leave or are fired within 1.5 years. Of these, 60% report problems in

forming effective relationships with colleagues as the key reason for their ultimate failure (A. Fisher, 2005). New employees can actively build relations by seeking opportunities to converse with their new colleagues; arranging informal times to talk, such as during lunch or coffee breaks; routinely participating in voluntary company functions; and making the effort to build a relationship with their new supervisor. Relationship building was found to be one of the important antecedents of socialization outcomes such as performance and satisfaction (Ashford & Black, 1996; Bauer, Erdogan, Liden, & Wayne, 2006; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

### Organizational Socialization Programs

Organizations vary in the ways they train and orient new employees. Differences among organizations include their socialization tactics and formal orientation programs, the degree to which realistic job previews are given to new employees, and how much organizational insiders help or hinder the adjustment process.

**Socialization tactics.** Organizations differ in the approach they take to employee socialization. Some organizations prefer a more structured and systematic approach to new employee socialization, whereas others follow a “sink or swim” approach in which new employees struggle to figure out what is expected of them and the existing norms. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) originally defined six dimensions of socialization tactics: (a) collective versus individual socialization, (b) formal or informal, (c) sequential or random training steps, (d) fixed or variable sequencing of training, (e) serial or disjunctive tactics in terms of insider help with adjustment, and (f) investiture or divestiture with divestiture asking newcomers to give up their prior self.

Jones (1986) studied these tactics and classified them along a continuum of institutionalized and individualized tactics. His distinction represents the different socialization tactics used by companies. Those companies that use institutionalized socialization tactics implement systematic step-by-step programs for new employees to teach them what their roles are, what the norms of the company are, and how they are

to behave. New employees go through several initiation experiences as part of a cohort while being isolated from existing employees. There is a fixed sequence of activities new employees participate in, and the timing of these activities is also predetermined. New employees often get help from organizational role models in this type of a system.

Other companies use individualized socialization tactics. In these companies, the new employee immediately starts working on his or her new position and tries to figure out the company values, norms, and expectations along the way. In companies using individualized socialization tactics, new employees are free to initiate their own relationships and will have to take a more proactive role in trying to understand company expectations, whereas in companies using institutionalized tactics, new employee learning and adjustment is orchestrated to a greater extent. Examples of organizations using institutionalized socialization tactics include large public accounting firms, in which new employees go through lengthy orientation and initiation activities as a cohort, and the military, in which new recruits undergo extensive training and socialization activities as part of a cohort.

Research has shown that employees tend to experience more positive job attitudes, higher levels of fit, and lower levels of turnover after they go through institutionalized socialization tactics compared with those who undergo individualized tactics (Bauer et al., 2007; Saks, Uggerslev & Fassina, 2007). However, this positive effect was stronger for new graduates taking their first job, as opposed to employees changing jobs (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Saks et al., 2007), and for employees who did not demonstrate proactive behaviors (Kim et al., 2005). Additionally, institutionalized socialization tactics may limit employee creativity because employees are expected to fit the status quo, whereas individualized tactics may encourage employees to demonstrate their own personality and values as opposed to fitting in with the culture. In fact, research has shown that institutionalized socialization is negatively related to role innovation (Ashforth & Saks, 1996), whereas individualized socialization tactics are positively related to adopting a more innovative orientation to one's responsibilities (N. J. Allen & Meyer, 1990; Jones, 1986). It is unclear on the basis of current

findings whether tactics influence actual creativity. Therefore, more research is needed to fully understand the implications of different socialization tactics used by organizations for employee behaviors as well as the conditions under which different socialization tactics may be more effective. Tactics can also help embed newcomers in the organization, according to a study by D. G. Allen (2006).

**Formal orientations.** Regardless of the type of socialization tactics utilized by organizations, a formal orientation program helps new employees understand the company culture and introduces them to their new roles and coworkers. An orientation program can help new employees feel welcome and provide them with information for being successful in their new jobs. Large organizations may have formal orientation programs consisting of lectures, videotapes, and written material, whereas other organizations may follow more unusual approaches. Orientations can last anywhere from a few hours to several months for formal training programs. For shorter orientations, some companies use computer-based orientations and Intranets to help support new employees and be consistent in different locations of the same company. Research has indicated that orientation programs are helpful in teaching employees about the goals and history of the company and communicating its power structure. These programs may also help with team integration (Klein & Weaver, 2000); however, one study showed that these benefits may not be realized to the same extent in computer-based orientations. Wesson and Gogus (2005) compared those taking part in a regular, face-to-face orientation with those undergoing a computer-based orientation and found a lower understanding of the job and of the company among those in the computer-based orientation. This indicates that different formats of orientations may not substitute for each other. Overall, effective onboarding programs are formally documented, communicated to all organizational members, consistently applied, and tracked over time (Bauer & Elder, 2006).

**Recruitment.** Social events and other recruiting functions play an essential role in finding the right employee–organization fit. Recruiting events can help newcomers gather additional information on what life

within the organization is really like. Recruiting-related activities can help newcomers form realistic expectations and prompt anticipatory dealing methods (Rynes, 1991). Therefore, new employee perceptions of the quality of recruitment practices have been linked to favorable socialization outcomes such as organizational commitment (Caldwell, Chatman, & O'Reilly, 1990).

**Realistic job previews.** Providing employees with a realistic preview of the job and company culture is another organizational strategy to facilitate new employee socialization. Giving employees as much accurate information as possible before they start working for a company seems to have advantages. By providing a realistic preview, companies may weed out potential employees who are clearly misfit to an organization and therefore avoid having to replace them shortly after hiring. Moreover, realistic previews may prevent new employees from suffering the results of unmet expectations. For example, an organization may create the impression that a new employee will be able to make his or her own decisions regarding the job and will have a lot of autonomy. However, in the first couple of months, the newcomer may discover that the company has a hierarchical nature and even little decisions need to be approved by superiors. This person is likely to be frustrated because of both the lack of autonomy and the unmet expectation that he or she has regarding autonomy. This discrepancy is likely to erode the new employee's loyalty to the company and might lead the employee to quit sooner than expected. On the contrary, had the employee found out about this prior to joining the company, he or she could have refused to take the job (in which case the company could have found a better fitting employee) or taken the job with a better understanding of what to expect. Research has shown that those new employees who receive a large amount of accurate information about the company and the new job tend to adjust better (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Klein, Fan, & Preacher, 2006). Companies can provide realistic job previews during recruitment and hiring and through other methods such as internships. Online retailer Zappos uses an innovative technique to pay hired employees to quit the organization after 1 week

of training if they do not feel they want to continue. This is a form of realistic job preview, which allows employees to form accurate judgments about their future in the organization.

**Organizational insiders.** A significant discovery in organizational socialization research is the importance of organizational insiders for successful socialization (Chatman, 1991; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). A mentor can help the newcomer in many ways, such as teaching the newcomer about the organization, offering advice, helping with job instruction, and offering social support (T. D. Allen, Eby, & Lentz, 2006). Mentors are also important because they can help answer questions that employees are uncomfortable asking their managers and can provide the support structure to help new employees fit in, both socially and politically (see Vol. 2, chap. 17, this handbook). Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993) examined learning and found that newcomers with mentors became more knowledgeable about their organizations than did newcomers without mentors. Research has found that newcomers are more likely to have learned and internalized the key values of their organization's culture if they have attended social events and spent time with an organizational mentor (Chatman, 1991). A study conducted on new faculty members recommended that activities such as mentoring programs should be used to help newcomers feel welcome and comfortable with their fresh environment. Activities such as mentoring programs offer opportunities for important interactions with colleagues and help to provide adequate information that helps newcomers adapt more easily to the new work environment (Cawyer & Friedrich, 1998). It is important for organizations to realize the importance of mentors when bringing a new member into the organization. Mentors can also help newcomers better manage their expectations and learn about the organization, including its events and practices, more efficiently. In addition to mentoring, organizational climate should be related to newcomer adjustment, but more research on this topic is needed to help determine which climates work best for which types of newcomers.

## Newcomer Adjustment

Newcomer adjustment (also referred to as *newcomer accommodation*) indicates how well a new employee is doing as he or she transitions from being an organizational outsider to an organizational insider.

There are a number of potential adjustment concepts that may indicate success or failure for newcomers, but research has tended to focus on four key variables: role clarity, self-efficacy, acceptance by organizational insiders, and knowledge of organizational culture. Other adjustment indicators that are still important but have received scant attention include person–organization fit (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004; Kim et al., 2005) and person–work group fit (Kirchmeyer, 1995).

**Role clarity.** Role clarity (or its flipside, role ambiguity) is a good indication of how well adjusted a newcomer feels about the new job itself. When new employees understand the roles they should occupy, higher role clarity is indicated. Role conflict has also been seen as a helpful indication of new employee adjustment, with lower role conflict being related to more positive socialization outcomes (Bauer et al., 2007; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Saks et al., 2007). In fact, role clarity has been found to be one of the most consistent predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment during the socialization process (Adkins, 1995).

**Self-efficacy.** *Self-efficacy* refers to how confident employees are in doing their jobs. A newcomer's feeling that he or she is able to master the job at hand should relate to positive organizational and individual outcomes. Research has shown that self-efficacy and similar concepts, such as task mastery, are highly related to socialization outcomes, such as organizational commitment, satisfaction, and turnover (Bauer et al., 2007; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003).

**Acceptance by organizational insiders.** Previously we noted that organizational insiders are an important aspect of the learning process for newcomers in terms of information about the organization that can be gleaned from them. In addition, it is also important for newcomers to feel socially comfortable and accepted by their peers and superiors. Research

has often treated acceptance by peers as an indicator of adjustment (e.g., Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). For example, research has shown that integration into one's work group is positively related to several socialization outcomes, such as commitment and turnover (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). High-quality relationships with both leaders and other team members are related to favorable socialization outcomes (Major et al., 1995).

**Knowledge of organizational culture.** Understanding an organization's culture and learning how the organization works has been treated as a key aspect of employee socialization. For example, research has shown that understanding organizational politics, understanding the goals and values of an organization, and learning the language unique to the organization are important indicators of employee adjustment and are associated with more distal outcomes, such as commitment, satisfaction, and turnover (Chao et al., 1994; Klein & Weaver, 2000).

## Socialization Outcomes: Satisfaction, Commitment, Turnover, and Performance

Research on employee socialization has examined a wide variety of outcomes of importance to employees and organizations. Even though different studies have examined slightly different outcomes, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover, and performance emerged in a large number of studies (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Bauer & Green, 1998; Bauer et al., 2007; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Other outcomes examined have included career effectiveness (Chao et al., 1994; Kirchmeyer, 1995) and stress (C. D. Fisher, 1985). (See also Vol. 2, chap. 11, this handbook, and chaps. 4 and 10, this volume.) In many cases, socialization outcomes were measured longitudinally, several months after the adjustment outcomes or other antecedents were collected (e.g., Major et al., 1995; Wesson & Gogus, 2005).

Bauer et al. (2007) meta-analyzed the relationship between newcomer information seeking, organizational socialization tactics, role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance, on the one hand, and outcomes of job satisfaction, organizational commitment,

turnover, and performance on the other hand. They found that adjustment mediated the relationship between information seeking and socialization tactics. The one exception to this was that organizational socialization tactics were directly related to satisfaction with an observed average correlation of .43.

## MEASUREMENT OF SOCIALIZATION

Research on socialization has been greatly influenced by the methods and measures used to assess socialization and the timing of data collection. We next turn our attention to these issues.

### Research Methods

Measurement of socialization has tended to be longitudinal, survey based, multisource, and carried out within the first year of employment. At times it has included preentry information, but normally the first data collection is after organizational entry. Bauer et al. (2007) examined whether studies were longitudinal as a potential moderator between adjustment and outcomes and found that cross-sectional relationships were significantly higher than those assessed longitudinally but that there was no evidence of a change in the sign of any of the relationships studied. Although most studies of socialization are at the individual level of analysis, studies at the group and organizational levels would also be appropriate.

### Measures of Socialization

In terms of measuring socialization, researchers have a few choices. One way is to gather information using indications of each of the adjustment and outcome factors. For example, in a popular measure of role conflict by House, Rizzo, and Lirtzman (1970), a sample item is "I receive incompatible requests from two or more people." Acceptance by others has been measured by Fey (1955), and a sample item is "People in this organization seem to like me." Self-efficacy has been measured using ideas from Bandura's (1986) approach and deals with a new employee's level of confidence in completing job tasks. The second way to measure socialization is to use a measure designed to tap the information learned by an employee while he or she is new to the job. For example, Chao et al. (1997), Haueter,

Macan, and Winter (2003), and Taormina (1994) all have scales of socialization. Chao et al. (1997)'s scale captures six dimensions of socialization, namely, performance proficiency, people, politics, language, and organizational goals and values. Items of this scale include "I know the organization's long-held traditions" and "I know how things 'really work' on the inside of this organization." Haueter et al.'s (2003) scale consists of 43 items capturing three dimensions: organizational, group, and task socialization. Sample items include "I understand this organization's objectives and goals," "I understand the expertise (e.g., skill, knowledge, etc.) each member brings to my particular work group," and "I understand how to perform the tasks that make up my job." Finally, Taormina (1994) focused on four domains of socialization: training received, understanding of the job and organization, coworker support, and future prospects in the employing organization. A sample item from this scale is "Company training gave me a thorough knowledge of my job skills." All three scales underwent extensive psychometric validation and may be useful depending on the goals of the data collection.

### What Is the Trajectory of Newcomer Adjustment?

The length of time it takes newcomers to adjust has consistently been of concern to socialization researchers. For example, C. D. Fisher (1986) noted that "socialization is a dynamic process in which individuals and organizations change over time. Many studies have failed to handle the time dimension appropriately" (p. 103). Bauer, Morrison, and Callister (1998) noted that organizational socialization researchers made large strides from 1986 to 1998 in terms of conducting longitudinal studies of socialization and noted that researchers have tended to gather information at 3-month intervals, including entry and 3 months, 6 months, 9 months, and 1 year following entry. Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, and Tucker (2006) summarized newcomer adjustment across time for all the longitudinal studies included in their subsequently published meta-analysis (Bauer et al., 2007). They were interested in examining the pattern of newcomer adjustment over time. For example, do newcomers encounter

a “honeymoon” phase upon entry that dissipates over time (e.g., Boswell, Boudreau, & Tichy, 2005)? The honeymoon effect posits that upon entering a new job, individuals will have positive early experiences but that this positive outlook will be tempered by a “shock” phase as described by Louis (1980). Understanding the inner workings of an organization takes time (Chatman, 1991). Initially, negative aspects of a new job are less apparent to newcomers, but these negative features and challenges become more salient over time. However, it is unclear whether newcomer organizational entry is followed by a downward or upward trajectory of adjustment. It is also unclear whether the different types of adjustment produce different trajectories over time.

Figure 2.2 presents the means within time category for each of the newcomer adjustment variables studied by Bauer et al. 2007. Mean self-efficacy increased over the first few months posthire and then decreased steadily after about 3 months. Mean role clarity dropped in the first few months but then

generally increased after the 3rd month. Mean social acceptance declined more slowly over the first 6 months and then generally increased past that point in time. The convergence and divergence of role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance over time are interesting. At initial organizational entry, these three variables are at similar levels above the midpoint of the scale, suggesting that newcomers start off by feeling confident in themselves, their roles, and their acceptance by peers. However, by 3 months, as employees experience more about their new jobs, these three variables diverge. Although employees generally appear more efficacious in doing their core job tasks, they may realize that their roles are more complex and that they need more clarity.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Research on newcomer socialization can take a variety of new directions. In this section, we outline four

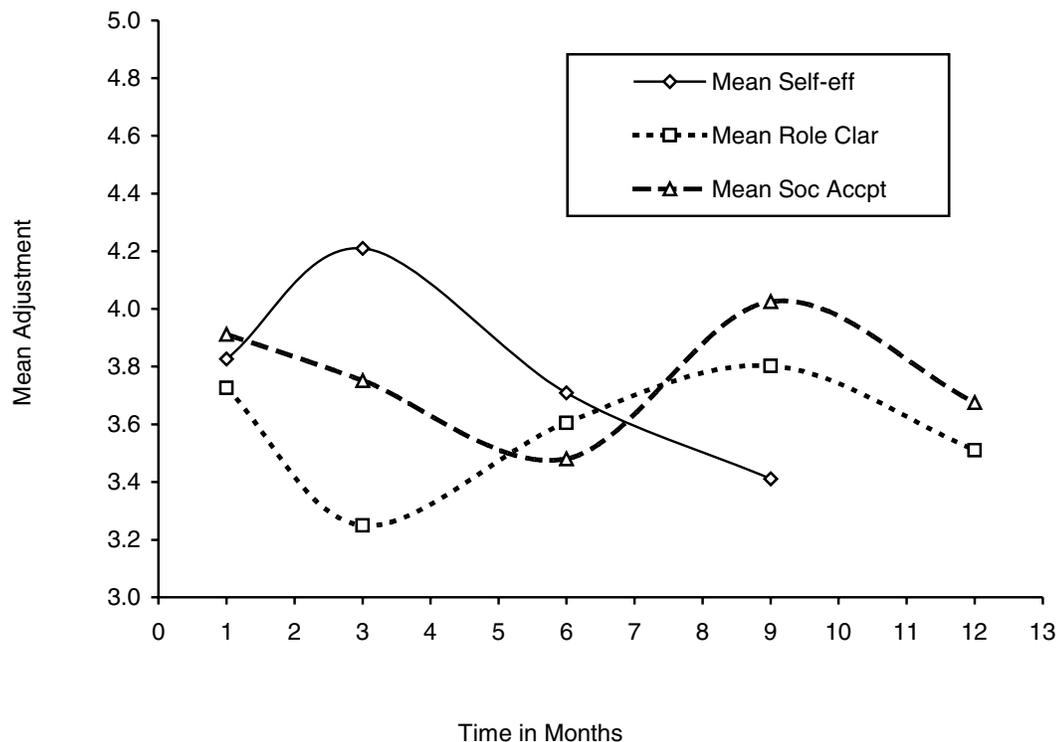


FIGURE 2.2. Mean newcomer adjustment over time (1 to 12 months postentry). Graph represents original variables across studies that were transformed to a scale ranging from 1 to 5. Each data point represents the mean level for that adjustment variable from 0 to 1 month, 1 to 3 months, 3 to 6 months, 6 to 9 months, and 9 to 12 months. Self-eff = self-efficacy; Clar = clarity; Soc Acpt = social acceptance.

specific areas for future research, including ideas on research methods and research topics.

### **Research Methods and Socialization**

As Bauer et al. (1998) noted over a decade ago, socialization research could still benefit from new methods for data collection, such as diary studies and the use of personal devices to survey newcomers on a regular basis rather than lengthy surveys months apart. We continue to suggest the usefulness of these innovative research designs despite the challenges in implementing them.

Another aspect of socialization that remains understudied is the role that socialization plays in employee well-being and stress. Future research that addresses stress outcomes would be beneficial for both individuals and organizations to better understand the stressors and strains newcomers experience when adapting to new organizations. Even positive life events, such as changing to a new job or career, can be stressful, and research on newcomer stress could benefit from further development.

Regarding the timing of socialization, research should examine whether lack of role clarity leads to more information seeking on the part of certain employees, as the data suggest that at later stages (6 and 9 months), newcomers' role clarity increased, as did their perceptions of peer acceptance. Research could extend findings to identify whether increases in role clarity at later stages is a result of seeking information from peers who accept the new employee. It is interesting that the dynamic nature of these adjustment variables decreases over time. That is, the "ups and downs" in the data seem to level off as newcomers become regular organizational members. Additionally, further research is needed to determine if socialization trajectories are stable across industries and job types as well as to determine potential moderators of these findings.

Research on gender and potential age differences in socialization is also needed. Bauer and Green (1994) found that for research scientists in training, the only difference between men and women was that women had lower self-efficacy in terms of their abilities to do research, although their performance did not differ from that of men. As the population

continues to age, more information is needed about the interaction between age and socialization, building on the work by Finkelstein, Kulas, and Dages (2004).

Another potentially fruitful research area is insider and newcomer fit of perceptions. Much of the data gathered comes from newcomers, but it is unclear how accurate newcomers are about their own adjustment. All of these suggestions would add to researchers' knowledge of newcomer socialization.

### **Culture**

The majority of studies on organizational socialization have been conducted in Western cultures. To date, only a small number of studies have examined newcomer socialization in other cultures. Some of these studies provide evidence of the generalizability of Western socialization models. For example, Menguc, Han, and Auh (2007) examined new salesperson socialization in South Korea and found that information seeking, building relationships, and networking were important predictors of socialization outcomes. Taormina and Bauer (2000) found that the same socialization adjustment indicators predicted socialization outcomes in Hong Kong and the United States. At the same time, few studies indicated that examining the role of national culture may provide a finer grained understanding of the socialization process around the globe. As a case in point, Morrison, Chen, and Salgado (2004) compared the feedback seeking patterns in the United States and Hong Kong and found a greater level of feedback seeking in the United States. It is plausible that the effectiveness of proactive behaviors on the socialization process is curtailed in high-power, distant cultures. It is important to consider that information seeking and feedback may have different cultural connotations. Similarly, the influence of interpersonal individual efforts, such as relationship building and networking, may be amplified in collectivistic cultures. It seems that the systematic testing of models of socialization in cultures with varying levels of power distance and collectivism as well as the direct examination of the role of individual level collectivism and power distance in socialization models are worthwhile research areas.

## Psychological Contracts and Socialization

Because psychological contract development and breach may be treated as indicators of employee adjustment, greater attention should be given to integrating these two literatures. (See also chap. 5, this volume.) Research has shown that in organizations that have a formal socialization process, employees are less likely to experience psychological contract breach (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Many of the antecedents of other adjustment antecedents, including newcomer personality and organizational strategies such as institutionalized tactics, the use of orientations, and organizational insiders, are likely to be influential in the development of psychological contracts. Therefore, incorporating psychological contract development, change, and breach into models of socialization will add value to the literature on socialization.

## Overqualification as an Indicator of Adjustment

To date, the literature has tended to examine employee adjustment in the form of self-efficacy, role clarity, or acceptance by peers, indicating that the individual is attempting to fit into the organization, and if the person falls short of organizational expectations, the person is less likely to be satisfied. However, it is also plausible for newcomers to feel that they are “too good” for the organization in question. This situation is described by the feeling that one has qualifications that exceed what the job and the organization require. Feelings of overqualification have been associated with lower levels of satisfaction and commitment and higher turnover but also with higher levels of job performance (Erdogan & Bauer, 2009; Fine & Nevo, 2008; Verhaest & Omey, 2006). It may be worthwhile to examine feelings of overqualification as an indicator of adjustment (for which high levels of perceived overqualification would indicate lower adjustment) and to examine factors creating feelings of overqualification in newcomers. For example, organizational efforts such as the use of institutionalized socialization tactics and realistic previews may reduce the likelihood of feeling overqualified. Moreover, even when an employee feels overqualified, the presence of mentors or other organizational insiders that provide support may alle-

viate his or her negative feelings of being overqualified. Thus, examining person–job fit as an indicator of adjustment and paying attention to the situation of overqualified and underqualified candidates may be important in increasing our understanding of the organizational socialization process.

In summary, organizational socialization is influenced by newcomer characteristics and behaviors, as well as by organizational efforts. Newcomer adjustment is associated with important employee and organizational outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment, turnover, and performance. In the past 3 decades, our understanding of a newcomer’s adjustment to organizations increased substantially. As employees change jobs more frequently and the cost of replacing an employee increases, understanding and managing the process of socialization will provide competitive advantages to organizations.

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