

Proactive Socialization and Behavioral Self-Management

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The purpose of this study was to examine behavioral self-management as a form of newcomer proactive socialization behavior. A longitudinal field study was conducted with a sample of 153 entry-level professionals who completed questionnaires during their first month of entry and 6 months after entry. The results indicated that self-management behavior was related to newcomers' general anxiety and stress at entry, and to internal motivation, ability to cope, and task-specific anxiety 6 months later. In addition, anxiety and stress at entry were found to mediate the relationships between self-management and ability to cope and task-specific anxiety. The research and practical implications of these findings are discussed. It is recommended that future research integrate the self-management and information seeking perspectives to provide a more complete theory of proactive socialization. © 1996 Academic Press, Inc.

As newcomers enter organizations they face the difficult task of learning the attitudes and behaviors that are necessary to perform new tasks and roles (Louis, 1980; Miller & Jablin, 1991). This transition period has been described as stressful for many newcomers (Katz, 1985; Nelson, 1987). Newcomers experience a "reality shock" as they encounter organizational life and begin to "learn the ropes" (Wanous, 1992). The uncertainty a newcomer feels about being able to cope with organization demands and the ambiguity concerning his or her role can also lead to stress and tension (Fisher, 1985). In fact, according to Wanous (1992), newcomers experience more stress right after entry than either before or after they have gained some experience, and this can result in undesirable consequences for individuals and organizations (Nelson, Quick, & Eakin, 1988; Wanous, 1992). Thus, it is important that the anxiety and stress that can accompany the socialization process be minimized so that newcomers can effectively learn the requisite attitudes and behaviors necessary to perform their roles and function in their organization.

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Wanous (1992) has argued that the orientation period should be devoted to helping newcomers cope with "entry stress." Several studies in the socialization literature have in fact demonstrated that organizations can ease newcomers' transition and assist them in their socialization through a variety of practices. For example, Louis, Posner, and Powell (1983) found that interactions with peers, supervisors, and senior co-workers were among the most important socialization practices and were positively related to newcomers' job attitudes. Jones (1986) found that socialization tactics were related to personal and role outcomes. In particular, he found that individualized socialization tactics, which encourage newcomers to question the status quo and develop their own approach to their roles, were related to an innovative role orientation and to higher levels of role conflict and ambiguity. Institutionalized socialization tactics, which encourage newcomers to passively accept preset roles and the status-quo, were related to a custodial role orientation and to higher job satisfaction and commitment and lower intentions to quit. Jones argued that these results support the hypothesis that institutionalized socialization tactics lower newcomers' uncertainty and reduce anxiety.

Thus, there is evidence that organizations can, through the use of various socialization programs, influence newcomers' personal and role outcomes. While these programs and their outcomes can benefit newcomers and organizations, they reflect a traditional and limited approach to socialization since newcomers are treated as passive or reactive during the socialization process (Morrison, 1993a). As Morrison (1993a) notes, "they focus on what organizations do to newcomers, and on how newcomers respond, without addressing ways in which newcomers may take a *proactive* role" (p.557).

In response to the traditional approach to socialization, socialization research has begun to adopt a perspective that views newcomers as "proactive" agents in their own socialization (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a). According to Miller and Jablin (1991), newcomers can reduce uncertainty in their work environments through their own proactive efforts. To date, the emphasis on proactive socialization has been on information seeking and acquisition. For example, Morrison (1993ab) found that the frequency of information seeking was related to task mastery, role clarity, and social integration, as well as socialization outcomes such as satisfaction, performance, and intentions to leave. Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) found that newcomers' acquisition of important information was related to their knowledge of different contextual domains, and both information and knowledge were related to higher satisfaction, commitment, and adjustment, and lower turnover intentions and stress.

In addition to information seeking, other forms of proactive behavior might also be useful for newcomers during their socialization. For example, newcomers who are proactive and adept at managing and structuring their early work experiences might experience more successful adjustment. The purpose

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