



Impact of organizational socialization tactics on newcomer job satisfaction and engagement: Core self-evaluations as moderators



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ABSTRACT

This study proposes and tests a new model in which newcomer core self-evaluations (CSE) moderate the effects of organizational socialization tactics (OST) on job satisfaction and work engagement. Data were collected in nine luxury hotels in China and a total of 161 parent respondents with 5000 bootstraps were analyzed using structural equation modeling technique. The results from this study indicate that newcomer job satisfaction and work engagement each is predicted by institutionalized OST directly and positively. They also indicate that CSE moderates the relationship between OST and job satisfaction, but not the one between OST and work engagement. In particular, hotel newcomers high on CSE are much more adept, than their low CSE counterparts, at translating their organizational advantages of institutionalized OST into job satisfaction. These findings as well as their theoretical and practical implications are discussed within the contexts of organizational socialization research and hotel human resource development practices.

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1. Introduction

Newcomer organizational socialization (OS) typically refers to the process by which he or she learns how to effectively function in the workplace by both socialization and individualization following organizational entry (Ashforth et al., 2007; Jablin, 1982; Song and Chathoth, 2011; Song et al., 2012; Taylor and Finley, 2010).¹ OS is an important issue for both employees and organizations for several reasons. First, newcomers adjust quickly in the early stages of their socialization into an organization, with early adjustment having lasting influences and quantifiable outcomes (Bauer and Green, 1994). The costs of neglecting to intervene in newcomer OS process could be a number of negative consequences such as job dissatisfaction (Saks et al., 2007), disengagement (Saks and Gruman, 2011), and/or turnover (Choi, 2006; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006).

According to Griffin et al. (2000), OS outcomes can be influenced by personal and environmental factors as well as the interactions between the two. Accordingly, the dynamics of OS can be captured from each of the following three perspectives: the situationalist, the individual difference, and the interactionist (Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Song and Chathoth, 2010). *The situationalist perspective* emphasizes the roles of factors in the organization in shaping newcomer work attitudes and behaviors. One of those factors is *organizational socialization tactics* (OST), which could be defined as “the ways in which the experiences of individuals in transition from one role to another are structured for them by others in the organization” (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979, p. 230). Furthermore, Bauer et al. (2007) note that OST is a predictor of newcomer job satisfaction.

The individual difference perspective otherwise emphasizes that factors in the person affect newcomer attitudes and behaviors. However, the foregoing two perspectives are argued to be limited in scope in that any of the perspectives alone cannot capture OS dynamics comprehensively (Gruman et al., 2006). However, *the interactionist perspective* could work around this limitation by integrating the foregoing two different approaches (Saks and Ashforth, 2000; Song and Chathoth, 2010). In the OS context, the interactionist perspective could be understood as the approach to studying the interplays between factors in the person and those in the organizations as well as their interaction effects on newcomer socialization

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¹ Organizational communication scholars prefer the term “organizational assimilation” to “organizational socialization” and they often distinguish between “socialization” as “role-taking” and “individualization” as “role-making” (Ashforth et al., 2007). For details, see the debate on whether organizational socialization or assimilation should be used, in the December 1999 issue of *Communication Monographs*, sparked by Kramer and Miller, 1999.

outcomes (Saks and Ashforth, 2000). For example, Sluss et al. (2012) note that *general self-efficacy* and *task significance* interact with each other to predict job satisfaction positively. To date, the roles of general self-efficacy as well as its moderating effects in newcomer OS phenomenon have been established (Sluss et al., 2012; Song and Chathoth, 2010), albeit not always consistently.

The role of general self-efficacy in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviors in organizational contexts has been empirically examined and confirmed in a number of studies (e.g., Song and Chathoth, 2010). Notably, one shift of this research paradigm involves the examination of individuals' *core self-evaluations* (CSE), a broad personality construct referring to fundamental appraisals that people make of their own self-worth, competence, and capabilities (Judge et al., 1997). This shift is largely due to CSE theory developed by Judge et al. (1997), who argue that CSE is a pretty broad theoretical construct that incorporates not only general self-efficacy, but also three more elements including general self-esteem, locus of control, and emotional stability.

Despite its short history, CSE is becoming a prevalent topic of investigation in the organizational sciences (Chang et al., 2012). While a majority of CSE research has focused on its direct effects on OS outcomes such as job performance (Song and Chathoth, 2013), a few studies (e.g., McNall et al., 2011) have explored the moderating roles of CSE in organizational contexts. To our knowledge, no study in this vein documents the moderating effects of CSE on the relationships between OST and each of the OS outcomes including job satisfaction and work engagement. Nevertheless, a review by Saks and Ashforth (1997) documents that job satisfaction is positively predicted by institutionalized OST. Research since 1997 (Bauer et al., 2007; Gruman et al., 2006) has reinforced this causal linkage. Recent research has expanded the number of OS outcomes including work engagement. In particular, Saks and Gruman (2011) theoretically hypothesize that institutionalized OST relates to newcomer work engagement. However, their empirical results do not support this hypothesis despite the sound rationale for the theoretical linkage between the two constructs. Furthermore, the generalizability of OS findings has been limited due to the fact that OS research has been solely based on the same few occupations using well-educated, white-collar, and Western samples (Ashforth et al., 2007). OS findings and conclusions that are meta-analyzed in Bauer et al. (2007), for instance, have not been based on hotel and resort organizations where less-educated newcomers dominate.

The research objectives of this study were therefore twofold: (a) to see whether institutionalized OST can predict hotel newcomer job satisfaction and work engagement, directly and respectively; and (b) to explore the potential moderating roles of CSE on the foregoing two direct causal linkages. In doing so, we not only illustrate how CSE may interact with OST to influence job satisfaction and work engagement, but also provide managers with guidance on enhancing their effectiveness in socializing newcomers. Below, Fig. 1 presents the conceptual framework within which the proposed direct and moderation effects are illustrated.

2. Theoretical background

Newcomer OS² has attracted the attention of many scholars and it continues to be an interesting and promising avenue of research (Bauer et al., 2007). Despite the strides made in OS research, the literature is often described as theoretically and conceptually fragmented (Bauer et al., 2007). This is attributable, in part, to "the relative lack of theory" in OS research (Cooper-Thomas and

Anderson, 2006). In this context, it is therefore necessary to look into the existing works that are both internal and external to the OS literature. This doing help develop a sound theoretical framework as well as research hypotheses.

2.1. The conceptual framework

The four theoretical constructs in the conceptual framework of this study have their theoretical and/or conceptual foundations in the literature. Specifically, OST is known as one of the classical theories in the OS domain (Saks et al., 2007). Job satisfaction is a default indicator of OS success (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007; Khalilzadeh et al., 2013). Work engagement is recently argued to be one more important OS outcome (Karatepe and Demir, 2013; Saks and Gruman, 2011). Whereas Ashforth et al. (2007) argue that CSE is an important variable of newcomer individual differences, Judge et al. (1997) have developed CSE theory in the domain of industrial and organizational psychology.

With regard to the direct and interaction effects in our conceptual model, OS scholars (Griffin et al., 2000; Saks and Ashforth, 2000) theoretically purport that newcomers react differently to similar environments, and that those factors both in the person and in the organization as well as the interactions between the two should be jointly considered to explain newcomers' work attitudes and behaviors. In the same vein, theoretical notion has it that through the lens of the interactionist, newcomers are not only passive recipients of socialization, but also active agents who seek out opportunities to influence others at their workplace (Ashforth et al., 2007).

Specifically, Judge et al. (1997) theoretical posits that general self-efficacy – one of the four CSE components – may interact with situation-specific variables to influence employees' job satisfaction. More specifically, Judge et al. (1998) propose that CSE interacts with employees' perceptions of work characteristics to influence job satisfaction, such that employees high on CSE see challenging work as more satisfying than their low CSE counterparts. As such, this study argues that OST predicts job satisfaction and work engagement, directly and respectively. It also argues that newcomers high on CSE should translate, better than those low on CSE, their organizational advantages of institutionalized OST into higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement.

2.2. Organizational socialization tactics (OST)

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) propose six typologies of OST employed by the organization. The six tactics, each of which is bipolar, are (1) *collective versus individual* (whether newcomers are socialized in groups or individually); (2) *formal versus informal* (whether newcomers are segregated from insiders during OS); (3) *sequential versus random* (whether newcomers are told explicitly about the sequencing of planned OS events); (4) *fixed versus variable* (whether there is an explicit, fixed timetable for completing the various OS stages); (5) *serial versus disjunctive* (whether previous job incumbents are available as role models for newcomers); and (6) *investiture versus divestiture* (whether newcomers receive positive social support from insiders).

In a given situation, OST may present itself as either *institutionalized* or *individualized*. The former is formed by *collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture* tactics; in contrast, the latter is characterized by *individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture* tactics (Ashforth et al., 2007; Jones, 1986). Whereas institutionalized tactics reflect the presence of a structured and formalized OS process, individualized tactics tend to reflect the absence of a structured OS process such that newcomers are socialized more by default than by design (Ashforth et al., 2007).

² Current OS models are mainly rooted in life course socialization, occupational socialization, and socialization in total institutions; see Section *Early Roots of Socialization Research* in Ashforth et al.'s (2007, pp. 3–8) review work for details.

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