



Socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment: A meta-analytic review and test of a model [☆]

Alan M. Saks ^{a,*}, Krista L. Uggerslev ^b, Neil E. Fassina ^b

^a *Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, Joseph L. Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, 121 St. George Street, Toronto, Ont., Canada M5S 2E8*

^b *I. H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3T 5V4*

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Abstract

One of the most popular and often studied topics in the organizational socialization literature is Van Maanen and Schein's [Van Maanen, J., & Schein, E. H. (1979). *Toward a theory of organizational socialization*. In B. M. Staw (Ed.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 1), pp. 209–264. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.] theory of organizational socialization tactics. Over 30 studies on socialization tactics have been conducted in the past 20 years. In this meta-analysis, we examine the relationships between six socialization tactics and various indicators of newcomer adjustment as well as the moderating effects of study design (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal), measurement scale (use of complete vs. modified tactics scale), and type of newcomer (recent graduates vs. other newcomers). Our results indicate that institutionalized socialization tactics were negatively related to role ambiguity, role conflict, and intentions to quit, and positively related to fit perceptions, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, and a custodial role orientation. We also found that the social tactics (serial and investiture) were the strongest predictors of adjustment outcomes. The results also indicated that the relationships between the tactics and outcomes were stronger for recent graduates compared to other newcomers; cross-sectional designs compared to longitudinal designs; and when Jones' [Jones, G. R. (1986). *Socialization tactics, self-efficacy, and newcomers' adjustments to organizations*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 29, 262–279.] complete scales were used compared to modified versions. Support was also found for a mediation model of newcomer adjustment in which role conflict, role ambiguity, and fit perceptions partially mediate some of the relationships

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* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 416 978 5696.

E-mail address: saks@utsc.utoronto.ca (A.M. Saks).

between the socialization tactics and distal outcomes of adjustment. The implications of these results for research and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The process of organizational socialization focuses on how newcomers adjust to their new surroundings and learn the behaviors, attitudes, and skills necessary to fulfill their new roles and function effectively as a member of an organization (Fisher, 1986; Van Maanen, 1976). Given the economic and demographic changes that are heightening the importance of employee recruitment and retention (Rynes & Cable, 2003) and the mobility of today's workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005), organizations have increasingly begun to focus on the process of "on-boarding" in order to facilitate newcomer learning and adjustment. Astute managers are realizing that they can enhance employee on-boarding and socialization by regulating the formal training and work experiences that newcomers receive early in the socialization process.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) proposed six socialization tactics that managers can employ to structure the socialization experience and ultimately influence the role orientation that newcomers adopt. Jones (1986) and other researchers (see Saks & Ashforth, 1997a) have demonstrated that Van Maanen and Schein's socialization tactics relate not only to employees' role orientation, but also to newcomers' role ambiguity, role conflict, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intentions to quit. In the past 20 years, however, there has been little attempt to go beyond this basic approach other than the addition of adjustment outcomes such as job performance and perceived job (PJ) and perceived organization (PO) fit (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005; Riordan, Weatherly, Vandenberg, & Self, 2001).

Focusing on the direct relationship between socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment has led to limited theoretical advancement in our understanding of socialization tactics (Saks & Ashforth, 1997a), and left many important questions unanswered. For example, we know relatively little about which tactics organizations should employ to best facilitate newcomer adjustment or if some tactics are more important than others in relation to certain adjustment outcomes. Additionally, it is unclear whether the tactics have differential effects on outcomes early versus later in an employee's socialization, or whether the tactics are more important for the adjustment of some newcomers (e.g., recent graduates) than others.

The present study seeks to address these limitations by first exploring the relative strengths of the relationships between the six socialization tactics with various indices of newcomer adjustment using meta-analytically derived coefficients. Next, we propose and test a model of newcomer socialization based on uncertainty reduction theory (Lester, 1987; Miller & Jablin, 1991) and person-environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005), in which the relationships between socialization tactics and distal adjustment outcomes are mediated by more proximal adjustment outcomes. Finally, we explore whether three methodological differences in socialization tactics research can

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