Intern newcomers' global self-esteem, overall job satisfaction, and choice intention: Person-organization fit as a mediator

Zibin Song [a], Prakash K. Chathoth [b],*

[a] School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hum, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR
[b] Department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management, Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD 4111, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study examines an integrative mediation model, in which *person-organization fit* (PO fit) mediates the effects of *global self-esteem* (GSE) on *choice intention* (CI) and *overall job satisfaction* (OJS), respectively. Intern newcomers who just finalized their placement in hospitality and tourism organizations responded to self-completed questionnaires. They were 336 senior undergraduates from two institutes of higher learning in China's Hainan Island. Structural equation modeling results indicated that PO fit mediates the relationship between GSE and CI fully, and between GSE and OJS partially. The study's findings as well as its implications are discussed within the context of newcomers' organizational socialization, in general, and human resource development practices in the hospitality and tourism organizations, in particular.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Globally, attracting and retaining high-quality employees has been an on-going problem for hospitality and tourism organizations (e.g., Richardson, 2009; Teng, 2008; Song and Chathoth, 2008; Chuang et al., 2007; Lam and Ching, 2007; Zhang Qiu and Wu, 2004). One important way to alleviate the problem is to maximize intern newcomers' positive socialization experiences in their placement organizations. In addition, intern newcomers' positive experiences are likely to bring about their positive attitude towards hospitality and tourism professions, which in turn may result in their behavioral intention and/or actual behavior of choosing to work within the industry, including the placement organizations (e.g., Teng, 2008; Chuang et al., 2007; Song et al., 2007; Kusluvan and Kusluvan, 2000).

1.1. Rationale for research

According to Louis (1980), *organizational socialization* is a process by which individuals learn the value, norms, and required behaviors that allow them to participate as members of organizations. It is important because it not only ensures the continuity of organizations' central values, but also provides a newcomer with an "interpretive schema" or "cognitive map" for responding to his or her new work environment and atmosphere (Falcione and Wilson, 1988; Jones, 1986). Moreover, newcomers adjust quickly in the early stage of their organizational socialization, with early

adjustment having lasting influences and quantifiable outcomes (Chen and Klimoski, 2003; Bauer and Green, 1994). Neglecting to socialize newcomers has been shown to have substantially negative impacts with newcomers frequently being plagued with hindrance stressors, which in turn are associated with poor work attitudes (e.g., job dissatisfaction) and negative behaviors such as turnover (Katz, 1985; Wanous and Colella, 1989; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). Given its importance, it is not surprising that to date this "on-boarding" issue has attracted the attention of many scholars who have used different approaches to address it.

One approach to studying organizational socialization – known as *situationist approach* – focuses on factors in the organization, e.g., socialization tactics (Jones, 1986) in shaping newcomers experiences in the organizational context (e.g., Gruman et al., 2006). This approach regards newcomers as passive and reactive agents. In contrast, in an alternative approach – *the individual difference approach* – the same newcomers are viewed as active agents in the socialization process (Morrison, 1993a,b). Despite the progress made in the past decades, the socialization literature has often been criticized as overemphasizing the situationist approach, somewhat ignoring the individual difference approach, and rarely examining newcomers' psychological and social variables (e.g., person-organization fit) that might mediate the relationship of antecedents (e.g., global self-esteem) and outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction) (Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Ashforth et al., 2007b; Bauer et al., 2007; Kowtha, 2008).

1.2. Research objectives

The purpose of this study is to propose and test a mediation model, in which a newcomer's *global self-esteem* (GSE) affects his

or her respective *choice intention* (CI) and *overall job satisfaction* (OJS) via his or her person-organization fit (PO fit) perception. Specifically, the research objectives are twofold: (1) to explore PO fit's potential mediating role in the relationship between an intern newcomer's GSE and his or her OJS as perceived in the respective placement organization; and (2) to explore PO fit's potential mediating role in the relationship between an intern newcomer's GSE and his or her CI. In so doing, this study adopts the individual difference approach in testing a causal model comprising the foregoing constructs. Through this, the present study aims to contribute to the literature by delving into the PO fit and its roles in mediating the relationships between global self-esteem and its two respective socialization outcomes: Choice intention and overall job satisfaction. In the section that follows, key constructs contained in the model are described and theoretical and empirical works in these areas are reviewed, following which research hypotheses are developed for the present study.

2. Literature review

Despite the strides made in organizational socialization research, the literature in this area has often been described as fragmented and poorly understood (Fisher, 1986; Wanous and Colella, 1989; Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Bauer et al., 2007). This is partly due to "*the relative lack of theory*" in socialization research (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). Saks and Ashforth (1997), for example, argued that there "*does not exist a theory*" (p. 235) in the domain of organizational socialization. Partly because of this issue, there has been a lack of agreement on what constitutes organizations' success in socializing newcomers (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). In fact, success-related socialization outcomes are likely to differ across newcomers, organizations, and industry specific situations (e.g., Bauer et al., 1998).

2.1. CI, OJS and PO fit as three important success-related socialization outcomes

A review of the literature indicated that organizations' success in socializing their intern newcomers can be largely measured by three outcome variables: CI, OJS, and PO fit. First, Bandura (1986) defined choice intention as people's willingness and likelihood to engage in a particular activity or to produce a particular outcome. In the context of socializing an intern newcomer, CI can be referred to as the extent of an intern newcomer's behavioral intention to choose or accept his or her placement organization as his or her formal employment workplace after graduation. Second, OJS can be understood as newcomer's positive appraisal of his or her job or job experiences (Locke, 1976; Fritzsche and Parrish, 2005) in the placement organization.

Third, PO fit is treated as an important success-related outcome by many scholars (e.g., Saks et al., 2007; McCulloch and Turban, 2007; Saks and Ashforth, 2002). It is broadly defined as the compatibility of individuals with their employment organizations (Kristof, 1996). Further, there is a distinction between objective and subjective PO fit. According to McCulloch and Turban (2007), objective PO fit denotes "*the actual similarity of an employee and an organization on fundamental characteristics such as values*" (p. 63). In contrast, subjective PO fit is referred to as an individual's subjective appraisal of compatibility between the employment organization and him or her (Kristof, 1996; Saks and Ashforth, 2002). According to Kristof (1996), perceived fit generally has a stronger relationship to individual attitudinal outcomes than actual or objective fit. Aside from these differences, it is believed that there is an overlap – and thus high relationship – between the two typologies of fit (Chatman, 1989; Saks and Ashforth, 2002). In fact, subjective fit is

particularly relevant in the context of organizational entry (Judge and Cable, 1997). Moreover, Saks and Ashforth (2002) argued that similar findings can be expected across samples using two different fit perceptions: subjective versus objective PO fit. Finally, a review of hospitality literature indicated that employees' PO fit perceptions have been rarely documented with only few exceptions. Tepeci and Bartlett (2002), for example, reported that PO fit is seen to explain significant outcome variance in the hospitality organizational contexts. A notable gap in this area, however, is that research into hospitality interns PO fit perceptions has been lacking. Based on the above, it is posited that subjective PO fit, along with the other two indictors of OJS and CI, can well capture the dynamics of organizations' success in socializing their intern newcomers.

2.2. Proximal vs. distal outcomes and proximal outcome's mediating role

Since Saks and Ashforth's (1997) review, socialization scholars have begun to differentiate proximal outcomes from distal outcomes and to propose the potential mediating roles of proximal outcomes depending on its specific situations. PO fit, for example, is often treated as a proximal outcome variable, owing to its nature of being more specific and proximal to the socialization process (e.g., Saks et al., 2007; Haueter et al., 2003). In comparison, OJS, for instance, is seen to be more distal to the same socialization process, and therefore, it can be labeled as a distal outcome (e.g., Haueter et al., 2003). Likewise, choice intention can also be treated as a distal outcome. Besides the distinction between proximal and distal outcomes, a proximal outcome is theoretically proposed to mediate the relationship between an antecedent and a more distal outcome in the organizational socialization domain (e.g., Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Bauer et al., 1998; Saks et al., 2007).

In this regard, the two meta-analytical models contribute significantly to the understanding of socialization's mediating mechanisms. One is by Saks et al. (2007), and in this model, newcomers' PO fit is seen to mediate the relationships between socialization tactics' (Jones, 1986) effects on several success-related socialization outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions. A notable gap in this model, however, is that it does not include any individual difference variables. Conversely, in the other mediation model developed by Bauer et al. (2007), newcomer information seeking – a variable of newcomer's behavioral proactivity – is integrated along with other important variables including antecedents (e.g., organizational socialization tactics) and proximal (e.g., task mastery) and distal outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction). Bauer et al.'s (2007) model is also limited such that newcomers' dispositional traits such as global self-esteem are not integrated. In fact, the exclusions of some important variables in the above two meta-analytic studies are largely due to the fact that these variables are too small to be considered in a meta-analytic study (Bauer et al., 2007; Saks et al., 2007).

2.3. The role of newcomers' individual differences during socialization

Thus far, with a few exceptions (e.g., self-efficacy and newcomers' behavioral proactivity such as information seeking) empirical findings regarding newcomers' individual differences on the socialization process and outcomes have been rare (Saks and Ashforth, 1997; Ashforth et al., 2007b). For example, *global self-esteem* is the overall evaluation of personal worth that people make about themselves, referring to people's self-acceptance, self-liking, and self-respect (Rosenberg, 1965; Robins et al., 2001; Judge et al., 1997). This construct has been neglected in that empirical evidences pertaining to it in socialization research has been rare. Notwithstanding this, Judge et al. (1997) formally theorized that