Measurement of newcomer socialization: Construct validation of a multidimensional scale

Jill A. Haueter,[a] Therese Hoff Macan,[b,*] and Joel Winter[c]

[a] *Anheuser-Busch Companies, Inc., 825 S. Hanley Road, 2W, St. Louis, MO 63105, USA*
[b] *Department of Psychology, University of Missouri–St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121-4499, USA*
[c] *Allstate Insurance Company, 321 Middlefield Road, Menlo Park, CA 94025, USA*

Abstract

A construct validation approach was taken to develop a primary measure of newcomer socialization that addresses shortcomings with a prior scale (Chao, Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). Three separate groups of subject matter experts reviewed items to ensure the content validity of the Newcomer Socialization Questionnaire (NSQ). Studies 1 and 2 examined the NSQ's psychometric properties using employed students and organizational newcomers as participants, respectively. Results illustrate scale reliability, factor structure, convergent and discriminant validity, and correlations with criterion variables. The NSQ measures three dimensions or domains of newcomer socialization: the organization, the group and the job/task. In addition, both factual knowledge and knowledge of expected role behaviors are assessed within each domain. Thus, the NSQ provides a useful measurement tool for researchers and practitioners interested in examining direct outcomes of being socialized.
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* Corresponding author. Fax: 314-516-5392.
E-mail address: Therese.Macan@umsl.edu (T.H. Macan).

1. Introduction

Organizational socialization is the process by which employees acquire knowledge about and adjust to new jobs, roles, work groups, and the culture of the organization in order to participate successfully as an organizational member (Fisher, 1986; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The socialization of newcomers or new hires in particular is considered the most crucial. It is at this initial point of entry into the organization where learning and adjustment issues are most prevalent and problematic for newcomers (Jones, 1983; Klein & Weaver, 2000; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Effective socialization can have lasting and positive effects such as enhancing person–job fit, person–organization fit, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intentions to stay, and performance of employees (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Morrison, 1993; O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Saks & Ashforth, 1996).

Although we have learned much from previous research, these past studies have predominantly measured secondary outcomes of socialization (e.g., job satisfaction, commitment) instead of the direct outcomes of socialization (e.g., learning, inclusion, and assimilation). We could advance our understanding greatly both theoretically and practically by focusing on more appropriate criteria and identifying specific learning, behaviors, and attitudes that result as newcomers are socialized. The examination of the relationships among the direct outcomes of being "socialized" and the different kinds of socialization tactics, individual difference variables, and organizational factors can help us not only understand the socialization process better but also aid practically in improving socialization strategies. Because these distal or secondary outcomes can be affected by other variables besides socialization, they have provided an incomplete measure of socialization (Klein & Weaver, 2000).

The lack of a standardized, valid scale to measure the content or primary outcomes of socialization has been advanced as a reason for minimal use of more appropriate criteria (Chao et al., 1994; Jones, 1986; Klein & Weaver, 2000). In response, Chao et al. developed a content measure of organizational socialization, but a number of shortcomings have been noted with their scale (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Klein & Weaver, 2000). The present article reports the development of a socialization scale that addresses these concerns. We present two psychometric studies to assess the construct validity of our new measure of newcomer socialization.

1.1. Concerns in measurements of socialization

Based on a review of Schein's (1971), Feldman's (1981), and Fisher's (1986) notions of organizational socialization, Chao et al. (1994) developed a six-dimension measure of organizational socialization. The six dimensions are: (1) performance proficiency, (2) people, (3) politics, (4) language, (5) organizational goals and values, and (6) history. Unfortunately, a number of potential problems with Chao et al.'s (1994) scale have been noted (Bauer et al., 1998; Klein & Weaver, 2000). In the present study, we focused on three specific concerns: (1) the inconsistent inclusion of different levels of analysis (i.e., job, work group, and organization) within specific dimensions, (2) the