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SOCIALIZATION AND RETENTION: THE EFFECTS OF SOCIALIZATION TACTICS ON NEW HIRES AND LONGITUDINAL EMPLOYMENT

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SOCIALIZATION AND RETENTION:
THE EFFECTS OF SOCIALIZATION TACTICS ON
NEW HIRES AND LONGITUDINAL EMPLOYMENT

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By
Katie Zarback
2017

The essay of Katie A. Zarback is hereby accepted:

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I certify that this is the original document

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Introduction

Employee retention has long been a significant concern among companies large and small. In recent times, companies have struggled more than ever as employee loyalty is not what it used to be, the baby boomer generation is heading toward retirement, and Millennials reject the traditional employee behaviors and career development paths followed by those before them. Increased mobility in the job market has meant that both open positions and the workers available to fill them are fluid. According to the most recent employee tenure summary released by the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), today's employees only stay at each job an average of 4.2 years, an already astonishing statistic that is expected to drop lower with the newest generation entering the work force. Wherein baby boomers tended to exercise greater commitment to one company and loyalty was highly valued, today's youngest employees have no qualms about job-hopping for greener pastures. Thus, when faced with the mounting challenges of retaining talent and high cost of turnover, organizations began to focus on the reasons that employees were leaving, seeking ways to increase employee commitment to the organization, as well as stop the revolving door. Analysis of organizational case studies and research indicated that companies must have strategies that address, encourage, and support newcomers' adjustment to and integration with the organization's work force (Friedman, 2006; Graybill, Carpenter, Offord, Piorun, & Shaffer,2013; Klein & Weaver, 2000). A vital component of new employee integration is organizational socialization (Bauer & Green, 1994; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

This paper examined the importance of successful new hire socialization tactics in organizations and the significance such tactics play in retaining employees. Historically,

research has indicated that the adoption of formal, institutionalized socialization programs in businesses creates a more successful socialization experience for new hires, leading to higher retention rates for employers. In recent years, the workplace environment has been shifting radically in response to the newest generation entering the workforce. These changes in the employment landscape warrant a closer look at how socialization tactics translate to meeting the needs of organizations and new employees today.

Literature Review

Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization is the "process through which a new organizational employee adapts from outsider to integrated and effective insider" (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p.492). Organizational socialization is a transformational process in which newcomers learn and adopt an organization's values and culture, assimilating to their roles within the organization (Bauer & Green, 1994; Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).

Socialization occurs any time that an employee crosses an organizational boundary, whether it is internal, such as a functional transfer or a hierarchical change, or external – joining a different organization. Researchers acknowledge that socialization challenges are essentially the same for internal employees moving into new roles as they are for new hires, for purposes of this project, the literature review focused solely on new hires entering the organization from the outside (Chao, et al., 1994; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006).

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Both organizations and new employees benefit from organizational socialization (Cable & Parson, 2001; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). For example, organizational socialization is important for identifying performance expectations and criteria for new employees. This information not only allows newcomers to contribute to organizational productivity quickly, but also gives the new employees a sense of making valued contributions (Chapman, 2009). Additionally, organizational socialization significantly effects the pace at which new employees adjust to their roles, yielding "lasting influence and quantifiable outcomes" (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 493). The more quickly new employees are able to adjust, the faster they can become engaged and begin contributing to the success of the organization. Socialization also contributes to the continuation of organizational norms and values, encouraging the alignment of new employees' personal values with those of the organization. Such alignment reduces the newcomers' intent to leave, "ensuring that firms receive greater returns from recruitment, selection, and training investments" (Cable & Parson, 2001, p. 2).

The early days of a new job can be very stressful for new employees (Chapman, 2009). For example, newcomers form certain expectations about an organization during the recruitment and selection process. One of the more critical challenges for new employees is the oft-experienced reality shock when those expectations do not correlate with the reality of the organizational life (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995). Other factors contributing to reality shock are the unfamiliar and unpredictable interactions with and responses from other members of the organization, and the ambiguity of initial expectations of supervisors and coworkers (Van Maanen & Schein,

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1979). In general, considerable uncertainty and anxiety confronts organizational newcomers upon entry (Madlock & Chory, 2014). The ways in which an organization manages the initial experiences, expectations and interactions of new employees with their role and other members of the organization are significant indicators of the organization's culture and commitment to its employees (Jones, 1986). "Firms' socialization practices likely influence the way newcomers perceive and adjust to organizations" (Cable & Parsons, 2001, p. 3).

Socialization Begins on Day One

Orientation tactics

Chapman (2009) noted that a thoughtfully designed orientation program can help reduce the stress experienced by newcomers upon organizational entry, further explaining "formal orientation can assist with the organizational socialization by providing information about the organization, job and culture to new employees. The informal socialization as the newcomers learn from fellow employees and participate in the organization is even more beneficial" (Chapman, 2009, p. 128).

Companies no longer view their employees as simply laboring cogs in the organizational machine. Rather, employers now view employees as "stakeholders" in the organization's success and champions of the organizational mission and vision (Dunn & Jasinski, 2009, p. 120). Consequently, Dunn and Jasinski indicated that the role of a new employee orientation program should be focused on the "transfer of culture," adding that providing mentors and peer support are essential resources in integrating newcomers into the organizations "social framework" (p. 120). Holton (2001) theorized that enhanced

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performance, employee commitment, and job satisfaction provide a measurable return on investment for commitment of resources to provide quality, meaningful development opportunities for new hires. The lack of an orientation program, or a poorly planned orientation program, may positively correlate with role ambiguity, anxiety, dissatisfaction, and unmet expectations, leading to a high turnover rate. Alternatively, a well-organized and well-executed orientation program can provide role clarity, improve performance and increase productivity, as well as reduce intentions to leave (Dunn & Jasinski, 2009; Sanders & Kleiner, 2002).

Most companies have some kind of orientation program for new hires. Whether the program is formal or informal, organizations recognize the need to share basic information about the organization as an important part of onboarding. Organizational socialization is described as "the process by which employees learn about and adapt to new jobs, roles, and the culture of the workplace" (Klein & Weaver, 2000, p. 47), and is a concept that goes beyond an employee's first day. Socialization for new employees is particularly significant because it sets the tone for the employee's experience in an organization. New employees make their decision to stay at an organization very early on in their time on the job, usually within a matter of weeks, if not days (Chapman, 2009). Research has indicated that organizational socialization is linked to employee engagement, commitment, positive performance, productivity, and turnover. According to Chao, et al. (1994), socialization is the primary way that individuals adapt and adjust to their roles within an organization. Organizational socialization may include "changes in or the development of new skills, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, values, and

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relationships, and the development of appropriate sense-making frameworks" (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 492). A failure to place an emphasis on socialization efforts has proven to affect significantly and negatively, an employee's initial experience in an organization, leading to higher levels of pessimism and turnover (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). The information provided to new employees from the start is "positively related to satisfaction, performance, commitment" and negatively correlated with stress and an employee's departure or intent to leave (Holton, 2001, p. 74).

Organizational Challenges

There are a number of challenges facing organizations in bringing newcomers into the fold. One of the primary and most obvious challenges with new hires is productivity and getting them up to speed quickly and efficiently (Rollag, Parise, & Cross, 2005). Indeed, the high cost of recruiting increases organizations' need for new employees to be fully functional and engaged as soon as possible (Graybill, et al., 2013). Another challenge is retention, keeping the newcomers in the company long enough to justify the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training them. Wanous, Stumpf & Bedrosian, (1979) studied new employees in a number of different organizations who found jobs through the New York State Employment Service. Over a third of the new hires quit within the first four weeks of employment. With the potential of a sustained turnover rate of up to 400%, it is a good example of how imperative it is that organizations identify best practices focused on retention of new hires (Kennedy & Burger, 1994). High turnover causes not only a strain on organizations' financial resource, but a strain on human capital as well.

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Additionally, constant advancement of technology makes it imperative that employees' update their skills and training properly for organizations to be able to respond to and compete in the global economy (Dunn & Jasinski, 2009). Employers want to be able to reap the benefits of investing in training opportunities for employees, and for the long-term impact to be worth the upfront cost.

More and more, organizational socialization is acknowledged as the common factor in successfully negotiating the challenges of bringing newcomers into an organization, such as those listed above. New hires experience somewhat of a reality shock when entering a new organization (Luis, 1980; Major et al., 1995). Even seasoned professionals who may be more confident in their role identification and job description than a less experienced employee could experience feeling like a fish out of water when adjusting to a new employer. Eliminating anxiety, role uncertainty, and cultural disconnect are key to making newcomers feel accepted. Orientation programs should help new employees cope with the stress of entering a new organization or new role, and facilitate a successful integration into the workplace (Kennedy & Berger, 1994). Organizational socialization is positively associated with role clarity, productivity, learning, and assimilation. Socialization offers the opportunity for new hires to acquire information about the organization, learn cultural expectations, introduction to co-workers at various levels (Klein & Weaver, 2000, Chapman, 2009. The absence of organizational socialization is associated with role ambiguity, anxiety, uncertainty, and poor attitudes, which translate into negative behavior and failed attempts to fully engage new employees (Sanders & Kleiner, 2002, Dunn & Jasinski, 2009).

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Socialization Tactics

One of the most prominent and widely referenced studies on organizational socialization is Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) research of organizational socialization tactics, defined as "the ways in which the experiences of individuals in a transition from one role to another are structured for them by others in the organization" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 230). Van Maanen and Schein identified a set of six tactical measures used during socialization to influence newcomers' role orientation. They indicated that each of the six measures existed on a bipolar continuum.

Collective-Individual.

The first measure on the continuum, Collective versus Individual socialization, refers to the manner in which new employees are introduced into to the organization, whether they are socialized in a group or individually. That is to say, on the collective end of the continuum, newcomers are segregated from regular organizational operations and are exposed to a specific set of learning experiences, intended to affect uniform responses to given situations (Saks & Gruman, 2011). On the other end of the continuum, individual socialization permits a more, as the name would suggest, individualized learning experience. An orientation designed to promote individual socialization generally involves more interaction with other members of the organization and is largely driven by the requirements and facets of the specific role for which the new employee has been hired.

Formal-Informal.

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The second domain is that of Formal versus Informal socialization; the tactic of a formal socialization closely parallels the collective tactic in that it involves an environment in which new employees are isolated from the rest of the organization while they learn and adjust to their roles. Conversely, a more informal socialization structure calls for newcomers to be quickly thrust into their new positions and the expectation is the new employee will learn "on the job." Of note, due to the variable and inconsistent delivery of information and communication of expectations, informal socialization is frequently associated with role ambiguity, negative emotions, anxiety, etc. (Ashforth & Saks, 1996).

Sequential-Random.

Sequential versus Random refers to the way in which the organization communicates guidelines and expectations regarding the sequence of activities and learning experiences for new employees. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) suggested that newcomers who are given information about navigating through the organization would be more likely to accept and follow organizational norms than those who receive little to no direction.

Fixed-Variable.

Fixed versus Variable is another bipolar tactic that closely parallels the preceding domain. A fixed socialization structure provides new employees with detailed information regarding the schedule or timeframe associated with each stage of the socialization process. Alternatively, when the organization offers little or no information and does not specify the timeline for socializations stages and completion, this approach

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is described as being variable (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Variable socialization practices create uncertainty, possibly exacerbating the anxiety and ambiguity already faced by newcomers.

Serial-Disjunctive.

The fifth domain is Serial versus Disjunctive (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), a tactic indicating whether veteran organizational members act as role models for newcomers, or whether new employees are required to make sense of their experiences on their own. The support and acceptance by colleagues and supervisors is a critical part of the integration of new hires and giving them a sense of belonging to the organization (Chapman, 2009; Korte, Brunhaver, & Sheppard, 2015). Sometimes a supervisor may believe in a "sink or swim" approach to managing newcomers, assuming that if new people are perceived as being talented enough to join the organization, they will be able to navigate their new role on their own, and will approach the supervisor when in need of help. This is not the case for most new hires, and the lack of support from a supervisor can quickly contribute to negative experiences and turnover. Moreover, studies have found that newcomers who were assigned a "buddy" reportedly were better socialized, more satisfied, and had less anxiety over their job fit and organizational fit than counterparts who did not have the benefit of a buddy system (Rollag, et al., 2005). The buddy system is built on the sentiment that newcomers can rely on an entrusted colleague, the "buddy," to informally teach them about the firm culture, values, language, etc. as well as the new hire's role and fit within the organization. The buddy can also

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serve as valuable social support to the new employees in their first few weeks as they begin making connections within the organization.

Investiture-divestiture.

The final measure, Investiture vs. Divestiture, can be described as positive versus negative. Investiture involves providing social support to newcomers, confirming their self-identities and fit within the organization. On the opposite end of the continuum, divestiture approaches new employees in a process that is meant to strip them of their incoming identities in order to reshape them in the manner required by the organization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). While organizations may intend for divestiture practices to encourage conformity to values and existing practices, newcomers generally are more willing to internalize organizational values and culture through more positive interactions. Negative experiences may lead to alienation and cultural dissonance (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Investiture tactics are more likely to produce stronger organizational commitment as well (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Building on Van Maanen and Schein's continuum model, Jones (1986) proposed that the six tactics introduced by Van Maanen and Schein could actually be categorized more broadly into three key socialization channels: context, content and social. Together, Van Maanen and Schein's six tactics and Jones' proposition on the broader categorization of these tactics, serve as the foundational principles for organizational socialization research. Jointly, their work is widely cited as fundamental to the progression of organizational socialization.

Context

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Jones (1986) asserted that the first two sets of tactics, collective versus individual and formal versus informal, address differing contexts in which organizations convey information to new hires. Likely, the context in which information is provided collectively to a group of new hires "through common learning experiences designed to produce standardized responses to situations" (Jones, 1986, p. 264), will produce results that vary from those produced in an individual context in terms of role orientation and organizational fit. Researchers hypothesized that, in general, organizational information provided in the context of a group yields higher socialization success; new hires experienced less role ambiguity, stronger organizational commitment, and more positive adjustment in expectations. As Saks and Gruman (2011) observed, the general lack of structure that is often associated with individualized socialization tactics would presumably precipitate feelings of uncertainty. In a longitudinal study of M.B.A. graduates' full-time employment experiences, Allen and Meyer (1990) found that "the use of individualized tactics correlated negatively with employees' commitment at 6 months" (p. 854). This is not to say that new hire orientation in the context of a more individualistic approach will always fall short in measures of organizational socialization success, but that collective tactics yield more positive long-term results.

The second set of tactics, formal versus informal, also relates to the contextual delivery of information to new hires. In a formal setting, organizations "segregate newcomers from other organizational members while they learn the responsibilities of their roles" (Jones, 1986, p. 264). By contrast, with the use of informal tactics,

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organizations provide more "on the job" training, and new hires become immediately integrated into teams with other employees (Jones, 1986).

Just as the first two sets of tactics address the HOW of information sharing, the third and fourth set of tactics focuses on WHAT organizations share.

Content

Sequential versus random and fixed versus variable, the third and fourth sets of tactics in Van Maanen and Schein's model (1979) are closely related and correlate with the content of organizational information that is provided to new hires. Sequential tactics provide new employees with "explicit information concerning the sequences of activities or experiences" (Jones, 1986, p. 264) they will have within the organization. The content delivered via fixed tactics offers a "clear picture of where newcomers are in the process of becoming full-fledged insiders, as well as when and how they will move to the next step" (Allen, 2006, p 243). On the other end of these spectrums, random and variable socialization tactics, respectively, new hires are given no indication of any sequence of socialization or the stages through which they will, or should be, evolving to measure successful socialization. Similar to the tactics related to context, the structure of content plays an important role in the successful socialization and long-term employee satisfaction (Chao, et al., 1994). The absence of structure in these socialization tactics for new hires often leads to relatively negative feelings regarding job orientation and fit within an organization.

While Jones theorized that the content and context factors would be the most influential in measures of organizational socialization success, subsequent studies found

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that interpersonal relationships, or social factors, were, in fact, the strongest predictors of organizational socialization outcomes (Bauer & Green, 1994; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Saks & Gruman, 2011).

Social

Jones (1986) asserted that the final two sets of tactics defined by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), serial versus disjunctive and investiture versus divestiture, are also closely related and address the way that organizational information is shared socially with new hires. These tactics rely on how the presence and quality of interpersonal relationships fosters the exchange of information.

In the serial model of socialization, experienced employees serve as mentors for new employees. Conversely, in a disjunctive model, there are no employees who served in the role previously, or no one is made available to the new employee to provide guidance or feedback. This situation forces new hires to develop their own processes and interpretations. Allen and Meyer (1990) found the serial-disjunctive dimension emerged as the most significant predictor of organizational commitment.

The final set of tactics, investiture versus divestiture, concern "the degree to which newcomers receive positive or negative support after entry from experienced organizational members" (Jones, 1986, p. 265). Interpersonal relationships in the workplace can have a significant influence on new employees, helping to shape the newcomers' understanding of their role and responsibilities. Chapman (2009) explained newcomers' reluctance to ask questions or approach colleagues and supervisors for assistance, pointing to the newcomers' desire to prove themselves. Organizational

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socialization has historically indicated that socialization tactics that offer more structured, institutionalized processes for newcomers, i.e. formal, collective, etc., produced the most positive and desirable effects for new employee socialization for both the new hires and the organization. Additionally, programs that provided support and encouragement from supervisors and others assisted new employees in making connections, establishing relationships, and better understanding their "fit" within an organization's operations.

Organizational Socialization Effects on Newcomers

When joining an organization, newcomers are looking for confirmation that they made the right decision so they do not wonder if something better may be out there for them if they kept searching. Effective socialization efforts help eliminate uncertainty about such decisions and offer new employees a positive transitional experience, thus making them more satisfied with their choice. New hires want to be able to let go of the "what if" and move forward with taking on their new role with confidence.

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Role Clarity

Socialization processes that promote frequent interaction with and feedback from supervisors and colleagues, as well as those that indicate expectations of progress for newcomers help reduce newcomers' feelings of role conflict and role ambiguity (Louis, 1980; Jones, 1986). Bauer and Green's (1994) study of doctoral students indicated that newcomers' involvement in professional, work-related activities positively correlated with perceived acceptance among colleagues and a reduction in role ambiguity. Positive socialization efforts to help new employees adjust to their job responsibilities, build relationships, and integrate with other team members mitigated role conflict and unmet expectations, even when the job or organization was different than the newcomer's initial expectations (Louis, 1980; Korte, et al. 2015).

Commitment

Organizational commitment has been found to be one of the most influential and consistent predictors of desired outcomes for organizational socialization (Meyer & Allen, 1997). The more easily newcomers are able to assimilate into the culture of an organization, the more confident they become in sticking with their decision to join that particular organization. Socialization tactics that engage newcomers and encourage adoption of organizational culture and behavior relate positively to the new employees' psychological attachment to the organization (Klein & Weaver, 2000).

New employees who experience positive emotions associated with the organization and their colleagues want to stay and build relationships. "Commitment to the organization has been considered to be a major hallmark of successful adjustment"

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(Simosi, 2010, p.303), as it means that a newcomer stays because, simply, they want to do so. Being able to engage with other team members and feel part of the group is critical to new employees' feelings of a good fit within the organization and eliminating lingering feelings of anxiety. Allen (2006) noted that newcomers who feel accepted by supervisors and colleagues are less likely leave the organization, even if faced with adverse situations, thus indicating that relationships are important factors in turnover decisions.

Performance

Newcomers' perceptions of how well they fit within an organization strongly influences productivity (Bauer & Green, 1994; Cable & Parsons, 2001). The use of supervisors and colleagues in creating perceived acceptance by the group helps to ameliorate the negative feelings associated with being an "outsider" and encourages socialization through interpersonal relationships. The identification of what needs to be learned and how well an individual masters the required knowledge, skills, and abilities can be directly influenced by the socialization process" (Chao et al., 1994, p. 731). Supervisor and colleague support is helpful in making sure that newcomers feel free to ask questions as they hone their skills. Tactics that reduce role stressors such as role ambiguity and role orientation correlate positively with an increase in ability to perform job responsibilities (Madlock & Chory, 2014).

Beneficial impact of organizational socialization process on employers

While research regarding the effects of organizational socialization on newcomers has increased over the years, there remain limited studies on the outcome of successful

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organizational socialization practices for employers. However, there is general understanding that the socialization benefits experienced by new employees extend to organizations; "devoting resources to providing high quality new employee development initiatives pays off with higher job satisfaction, commitment and psychological success and with lower post-decision dissonance and intent to leave" (Holton, 2001, p.84).

Organizational Stability

"Internal stability is about minimizing the disruptive effects of staff absenteeism and turnover" (Cooper-Thomas, 2006, p. 501). The burden of employee turnover is wide ranging. There exists the financial burden, the costly efforts to recruit, onboard and train new hires. There is also a burden on existing employees, whether this is through disruption in workflow, or increase in workload to accommodate insufficient staffing levels, or low morale because of a revolving door of colleagues. As Chapman (2009) noted, the costs brought on by unnecessary or unexpected turnover rates "can quickly create a profound effect on the organization's budget" (p. 126).

Successful socialization tactics correlated positively with organizational commitment. Sanders and Kleiner (2002) explained the importance of newcomers' alignment with organizational values and job responsibilities in levels of job satisfaction, a significant factor in turnover and employee intention to leave. Failing to integrate newcomers properly and effectively into an organization is a frequent contributor to poor retention rates (Friedman, 2006; Chapman, 2009). The adoption of socialization tactics that reflect and reinforce organizational culture is an influential step in mitigating turnover.

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Social Cohesion

In addition to organizational stability, another significant socialization benefit to organizations is the reinforcement of culture through social cohesion. Saks and Gruman (2011) found that successful socialization tactics resulted in positive feelings of person-organizational fit. Newcomers perceived acceptance from supervisors and colleagues, strengthening the organizational culture. Cable and Parsons (2001) observed that strong, positive socialization practices led newcomers to feel more comfortable in their environments and gain the confidence to develop social networks. Workplace relationships help new employees determine their fit within an organization, which can lead to a reduction in anxiety and uncertainty (Allen, 2006). Newcomers want to feel valued and have a sense of contributing to the overall success of the organization. Holton (2001) concluded that providing new employees the opportunity to utilize their skills and abilities in ways that they perceived as helpful related positively to job satisfaction and a sense of belonging to the organization. Several studies discussed throughout this review have indicated that social tactics – as in those that focus on establishing and building relationships in the workplace – are the most influential in successfully socializing newcomers. In order to establish a cohesive culture, organizations must involve supervisors and colleagues early on in the orientation process to begin building the relationship with the new employee.

Productivity

Organizational socialization significantly affects a new employee's level of productivity in that positive socialization helps new employees get up to speed faster.

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Kennedy and Berger (1994) suggested that orientation programs could curtail feelings of vulnerability and help develop confidence in newcomers regarding their ability to perform job tasks, thus facilitating a successful transition from outsider to productive team member. Korte, et al. (2015) studied new hires and managers and found the most successful newcomers experienced high quality relationships and frequent interactions with their managers and coworkers. Alternatively, new employees who did not have these positive interpersonal relationships and socially developmental experiences reportedly expressed lower levels of job satisfaction and more anxiety than their counterparts did. Additionally, newcomers who feel valued and view their tasks as meaningful and contributory are the most productive in their new roles (Madlock & Chory, 2014).

The Changing Professional Environment

There is no denying that the organizations and the work place environment that were studied by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), Jones (1986), and others in the early days of organizational socialization research were much different than the diverse and intergenerational employment universe that organizations navigate today. The youngest generation entering the workforce, Generation Y - or "Millennials", as they are frequently identified, are turning the traditional workplace on its end. This generation is the largest group to flood the employment market since the Baby Boomers (DeVaney, 2015), and has shown that they are a force with which to be reckoned. As much as the Boomer generation has been defined as loyal workaholics committed to following rules and respecting hierarchical structures, Millennials are characterized as being self-absorbed, indifferent to authority, and eschewing traditional organizational models (Bencsik,

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Horvath-Csikos, & Juhasz, 2016). On the other hand, some may also praise Millennials'
as being tech savvy, creative, and civic minded. Whatever the perception, it is obvious
that the viewpoints and behavior of this younger generation are different from their
predecessors (Anders, Baur, Griffith & Buckley, 2016). Their entrance into the workforce
has forced employers to examine cultural elements and practices that have been in place
for years in an effort to attract and retain young talent. While the older members of
business organizations may grumble and criticize the millennial generation for its
expectations of and approaches to employment, most can agree that this is not a
population to ignore. Finding ways to meet their needs and integrate them into the
workplace is important for sustainable business operations and growth.

  One of the most significant characterizations of Millennials is the import they
place on communication. Millennials value open and frequent communication with their
peers and supervisors (Martin, 2016). Millennials are more likely than their older
coworkers are to challenge authority and question the status quo. Many members of this
younger generation of workers grew up in environments in which their parents included
them in decision-making processes and encouraged them to ask questions. The
expectation that they be included and that their opinions be valued has now carried into
their workplace behaviors. Because their thoughts and opinions carried weight with
members of authority during their childhood, Millennials want their thoughts and
opinions heard and respected at work (Strauss, 2016; Carr, 2017). They also assume a
right to access to managers and executives at a level that other generations would not
have expected, especially not without having "put in their time." This creates a

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dichotomy that can obviously lead to feelings of resentment by older members of the organization who view the attitudes of Millennials as being disrespectful. Transparency, a big part of open communication, is extremely important to Millennials when they are looking at an organization for employment. As Myers and Sadghiani (2010) indicated, Millennials are unlikely to accept communication policies that offer information on a "need-to-know" basis and assume that they should be kept apprised of organizational discussions and decisions, even if such information is considered high-level strategy.

Hand in hand with the expectation of dynamic communication is the desire for feedback at a level that older employees have not experienced. This generation received high levels of praise and appreciation from parents, coaches, and other adults simply for participation and presence. Their expectation is that feedback will be provided with heavy doses of praise and positivity (Zabriskie, 2016). Moreover, Millennials are accustomed to receiving instant feedback through social media, bringing this into the workplace and requiring frequent feedback from coworkers and managers, often throughout the stages of a project, or even daily (Strauss, 2016). The youngest generation in today's organizations desires feedback to be honest and genuine while also being supportive and affirming in nature (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). They expect to receive positive reinforcement on their work and most do not handle negative criticism well (Ramesh & Vasuki, 2013).

Close personal relationships are highly valued by Millennials, often expressed as being more important than workplace benefits (Martin, 2016; Strauss, 2016). Despite the commonality of the individual contributor role, a function perceived by many

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organizations to support productivity and innovation, Millennials value teamwork and the ability to work within a group (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Many members of the younger workforce generation thrive on collaborative work and support from colleagues (Barsh, Brown, & Kian, 2016). Millennials are used to socializing in groups and feel most comfortable in a workplace environment reflective of the way they conduct personal relationships. In addition to collaborative opportunities, Millennials frequently express a desire for strong mentoring relationships and have expectations of close relationships with their managers. Millennials, as compared to their older generation counterparts, are more likely to value working for a supervisor whom they admire and with whom they feel a certain level of friendship (Anderson, 2016).

Not unlike other generations, but perhaps more aggressively and overtly communicated, Millennials want to know that their work and their role within an organization matters (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Strauss, 2016)). They expect to have this information laid out for them clearly, and do not hesitate to jump ship when they find that certain aspects of a job are not satisfying (Ramesh & Vasuki, 2013). "Millennials believe that they are very capable and they do not relish the idea of working their way up the ladder" (DeVaney, 2015, p. 13). This younger generation values work-life balance, and wants to feel that the time spent at work is worth it to them – if they do not understand a path for promotion quickly, they will move on to the next opportunity (Meyers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Millennials tend to be more individualistic in their interests than past generations, which can make inspiring them to work toward the

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common organizational interest, such as the success of the business, quite challenging (Anderson, 2016).

The expectations and needs of the youngest generations in the labor market are creating waves of change that previous generations could not have imagined creating. Many of the standard practices in place for years are now threatened by, if not completely discarded, for an era of new approaches in hiring and retaining employees. Most organizations, no matter the size or industry, recognize that the changes initiated by Millennials must be embraced, not repudiated, if the business is to be sustained. Regardless of whether the older generations in an organization understand or value the priorities of the millennial members of the workforce, these priorities present challenges for recruiting and retention.

Much of the reviewed research on organizational socialization remains steadfast in referencing the basic principles of socialization Van Maanen and Schein (1979) put forth in their spectrum of socialization tactics and by Jones (1986) in his further established categorizations for said tactics. Undoubtedly, the organizational components that served as subjects for Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Jones (1986) were different from organizations and the workforce today. More specifically, Millennials were not part of the organizations studied in this past research. Thus, while certainly historically valuable for establishing the fundamentals of organizational socialization, many of the fundamentals of the subject workforce have significantly shifted in recent years with the inception of Millennials in the labor market.

Research Questions

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Following a review of the literature available on organizational socialization and its importance in employee retention, some compelling questions presented an opportunity to delve more deeply into current socialization practices. Are the tactics and categories Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Jones (1986) presented applicable in today's evolving organizations? Specifically, we ask the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the best practices for successful organizational socialization in today's workplace environment?

RQ 2: How have these practices evolved in response to the changing needs of the intergenerational workforce?

Method and Structure

Protocol

Based on the literature review above regarding organizational socialization practices and the changing dynamic of the intergenerational workforce, further research examined applied best practices in socialization efforts for new employees. Particularly, how do organizations use socialization tactics today and how did they evolve over the past several years in response to the millennial generation entering the workplace?

An interview questionnaire was developed using information compiled from the literature. Questions were formulated to provide a consistent and structured basis for collecting orientation and socialization practices found to be successful by the organizations using them. The questions were limited to keep the interview length approximately 30 minutes.

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The interview proposal, including the required application form, sample information letter for participants, and a copy of the interview questions were submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The IRB determined that the proposed project did not require IRB approval to move forward due to the limited number of subjects to be interviewed. This was documented via email.

Five interview subjects were selected through networking and based on availability. Subjects were contacted via email and sent an information letter explaining the project, as well as provided a copy of the interview questions. The information letter indicated that identifiable information would not be shared or discussed as part of the project and that the purpose of the interview was simply to collect the information gleaned from answers to the interview questions.

Subject agreement to participate was voluntary and obtained via email. Phone interviews were scheduled based on each subject's availability and convenience. The details of the information letter were reiterated to subjects verbally prior to beginning the phone interviews to ensure clear understanding of the project goals and interview structure.

Participants

Participants were all senior human resource professionals and actively employed at the time of the interview. The participant group comprised three females and two males, and ranged in age from 33 to 55. Two of the participants had 10 years of human resources (HR) industry experience, one participant had 15 years of experience in the HR industry, and two had over 20 years of industry experience. The organizations in which

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participants performed their roles varied across industries, and ranged in size from approximately 100 employees to nearly 10,000. This broad range in representation of organizational size provided a good sample for comparable experiences in interview responses.

Interview Guide

It has been well established that socialization efforts influence newcomers' adjustment into their roles and fit within an organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Jones 1986; Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Madlock & Chory, 2014). Practices such as orientation programs, whether formal or informal, are one of the most vital components in successfully socializing new hires (Chapman, 2008; Louis, 1980). Perhaps just as widely accepted as the importance of organizational socialization, though not studied for quite as many years, is the observation that the introduction of Millennials to the workforce has created a generational shift in traditional workplace practices and values (Bencsik, et al., 2016; Ramesh & Vasuki, 2013; Barsh, et al., 2016).

Interview questions were developed based on existing research literature. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, in that the questions were limited in number to fit within the established 30 minute time frame while also being open-ended to encourage the free flow of information. The interview was focused on collecting information on organizational socialization efforts, trends in best practices, and experiences of the subjects in how onboarding practices have been impacted by the Millennials' entrance to the workforce.

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The interview questions began with establishing the presence of an orientation program within the subject's organization and the description of the program, such as whether it was formal or informal, what information the orientation covered, and how they delivered the information (see Appendix A). The questions also addressed how organizations manage some of the challenges faced by newcomers. For example, new employees are likely to experience an overload of information regarding the organization and the new role (Rollag, et al., 2005). An onboarding program that recognizes the potential for overload and takes steps to control the flow of information will alleviate some of the anxieties experienced by newcomers. The questions also addressed the socialization efforts of organizations and practices for how best to help new hires navigate their new environment, build relationships, and network.

Additional questions explored the development and implementation of the program and the involvement by the organization's senior leadership in supporting integration and socialization of new hires.

Finally, the interview questions also delved into the influx of Millennials, observations of generational shifts, and how Millennials presence has affected organizational socialization practices (Bencsik, et al., 2016).

Results

All of the subject organizations, regardless of size, had some kind of orientation program for new hires, and all of the interview participants expressed a general consent that efforts to integrate and socialize newcomers were significant to the organizations' overall business plan. Given the importance of talent retention to business continuity, it is

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no doubt in a company's best interest to dedicate resources for the socialization of new employees.

The larger organizations tended to have more formal and structured programs. The organizations on the smaller end of the spectrum still had substantial structure to their programs in terms of the how, what, when and how of information delivery, but appeared to be slightly less formal in how the programs were executed. One organization had a collective approach to orientation wherein they scheduled the program monthly for new employees. However, most organizations subscribed to an individualized approach, citing variations in job roles, previous experience of the newcomer, and business needs.

Following the order of the interview questions, a few themes emerged from the participants' responses:

Theme 1: Technology is key

Interview participants indicated that technology is fundamental in onboarding and socializing new hires. All of the organizations an intranet site for employees that the interview subjects deemed as vital for providing basic company information for newcomers, including policies and procedures, company directories, payroll forms, and other essential resources. As one participant stated, "Fifteen, maybe even ten years ago, an intranet site was a 'nice to have.' Now, it's a must have." SharePoint sites, where employees can share files and documents and collaborate on projects, were also ways for new hires to obtain useful job tools.

While one of the participants shared that they provided some hard copy information to new hires, the others indicated that the onboarding process was completely

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paperless. One of the participants explained that all new hire paperwork for the organization is completed online prior to the new employee's first day, getting the mundane and time consuming activities over with so that orientation is focused on socializing the new team member. Of the one organization still relying on hard copies, the interview participant explained that paper binder for new hires held significantly less content than in the past, largely containing instructions for how to access the various websites and information systems utilized by company employees.

In addition to intranet sites, three of the interview participants mentioned that organizations are embracing various social media platforms as a means to connect. Recognizing that social media is not just a tool to connect to the outside world, companies are using social media as a means to connect and engage with internal stakeholders as well.

Interview participants also conceded that technology is now the primary way by which they provide employee training, education, and development. All of the participants agreed that online modules made training more efficient and employee-controlled. For example, an online training opportunity meant that employees on an overnight shift did not have to come in during typical 8-5 hours to attend training.

Theme 2: Mentors and Buddy Systems

Mentoring and buddy programs were another major theme across the subject interviews. Whether it was a formal or informal arrangement, each of the HR managers indicated that these kind of programs were a vital component of helping newcomers navigate the organization.

Two of the interview participants explained the implementation of formal mentoring programs offered to new hires, wherein the organization assigned a mentor to the new employee for their first 90 days within the organization. During that time, it is the intention that the mentor serves as a valuable resource for the newcomer, helping the person settle into the role and to figure out the tools necessary to perform the job functions, provide introductions to other members of the organization, and advise the new employee on policies and procedures.

The other three participants cited the use of buddy systems in their organizations' onboarding processes. Buddies were described as a colleague or member of the new hire's team who was not necessarily in a supervisory role but had a greater level of experience and had been at the organization for a long enough time that they could offer an appropriate level of support to the newcomer. Buddies were tasked with helping new hires with everything from the understanding the role and organizational fit, to assisting the new hires in building professional relationships and networking, to eating lunch with them. As one of the interview participants explained, sometimes the seemingly simple or mundane subjects, such as where to park or grab something to eat near the office, are those that really help newcomers feel like part of the group.

In addition to its mentoring program, one of the subject organizations also includes shadowing in its orientation program. New employees shadow five different people in five different roles outside of their own. Shadowing experiences last for one day. The goal is to help new hires understand the different parts of the company as well as how their roles affect each other part of the organization.

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Theme 3: Socialize early and often

According to interview participants, gone are the days of sequestering new hires in a conference room away from the eyes of others for orientation and training. Rather, organizations recognize the value in integrating newcomers with existing team members quickly. All of the interview participants indicated that, because most new hire forms and basic company information, such as mission, culture, values etc. is now available online and readily accessible, newcomers typically joined their intended work groups by the second half of their first day, with the assumption that the new employees could self-manage exploration of the company intranet.

Training and education modules that traditionally may have stretched out over the course of several days were broken down into shorter lesson plans and completed at a more palatable pace. One of the interview subjects explained that training offered in "more bite size pieces" gave the new hires a chance to absorb what they learned, rather than asking them to bite off more information than they can chew, so to speak, and risk forgetting a large portion of what they heard. In addition, shortening the training and spreading it out over a longer time allowed new hires to join their teams more quickly.

For one subject organization that involved plant engineers, the revised training schedule allowed new hires to complete the necessary training module, then join their team and apply the new training. After applying the initial training for a couple of days, the new engineer would complete the next training module, afterward rejoining the team and applying the new training, giving the new employees a chance to more comfortably take in the new information. The overall view expressed by interview participants was

that the socialization component of orientation was the most important measure for success and that the earlier newcomers could mix with their teams, the better.

The buddy system was mentioned again as a good tool for socialization, as the buddies act as conduits in connecting new employees to existing team members and other business areas. Interview participants agreed that having the buddy, someone who knew the ins and outs of the organization and had various contacts within the organization, made it more comfortable for new hires to approach others and begin making connections of their own.

One of the subject organizations offered employee resource groups as another means to help employees connect with one another. The interview participant shared that new hires were encouraged to explore and join a resource group to engage and network. The organization viewed these resource groups as a means to give employees, new and existing, a way to build deeper relationships within the organization.

Theme 4: Progressive Mile Markers and Road Maps

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the wide use of schedules for new employee progress. All but the smallest subject organization had a structured milestone schedules, or 30-60-90-day plan for new hires. These plans give newcomers insight beyond the first few days of employment, and help them know what to expect over the next few months within the organization. These schedules also helped to give new hires an indication of the organization's priorities, realizing that training or education that is more critical occurred within the first 30 days. The extended timeline

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offered new employees a way to gage their progress, understanding what they should know or accomplish be the 30, 60, and finally 90-day mark.

The interview participants from the subject organizations with the 30-60-90 day schedules expressed that setting progress milestones for new hires was helpful not only to the new employee, but also for the organization in monitoring the progress of its new hires. One interview participant pointed out that milestone schedules were helpful in preventing newcomers from being overwhelmed, as well as giving them realistic expectations and standards to set for themselves.

Hand in hand with the mile marker progress schedules, three interview subjects also mentioned that the organization conducted check-ins with the new hires at the specified mile markers to make sure that the new employee received he tools and support needed to do their job.

Theme 5: Millennials Effected Changes

Last, a final theme was interview subjects' consensus that onboarding and socialization practices changed rather significantly over the past five or so years, with many of those changes made in response to a new generation of newcomers.

All of the interview subjects cited an increase in the utilization of technology to deliver information and education to new hires as Millennials entered the workforce. The aforementioned intranet sites represented the steps taken by organizations to adapt to the needs of the youngest generation, as does the rise in utilization of social media platforms, as social media plays a vital part in Millennials' interactions. One participant noted that the subject organization found that posting short videos on its public website about the

benefits of joining their team were more effective in recruiting than traditional text-based content. Participants agreed that with the arrival of Millennials in the workplace, organizations became more technologically advanced.

Three of the interview participants indicated that they found Millennials to have much shorter attention spans than previous generations, forcing organizations to revisit their training and education modules. Interview participants explained that shortening the length of training time and breaking it up with time spent with the new hires team was driven in part by the realization that millennials were not willing to sit still and participate in traditional training sessions.

Interview participants agreed that the subjects' organizations focused on communication more in response to the needs and expectations of the youngest workforce generation. They found that Millennials required frequent communication throughout the orientation process and expected candid feedback on their work. Additionally, Millennials often questioned processes and procedures and desired detailed explanations as to why said process or procedure was in place.

A sentiment expressed by the interview participants was that expected behaviors that once appeared to be common sense or generally understood, such as acceptable dress code or checking in with supervisors on schedule or work progress, now necessitate explicit communication. With the arrival of a new generation, organizations realized that expectations that seemed obvious were not obvious to everyone. One participant observed that he sometimes felt his interactions as a HR manager with Millennial new hires reached further than with older generations. As an example, this participant had to

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suggest gently to a new employee that he wear a belt, or, that just because the employee felt comfortable in jeans and t-shirts did not make it appropriate for meetings with stakeholders, or, that the employees could not come and go throughout the day as they pleased without notifying their supervisors.

It is important to note that each of the interview participants stressed that they did not view the changes brought about by the flood of Millennials entering the workplace negatively. Rather, the participants saw these adjustments as a healthy challenge to the status quo, admitting that it forced them in their own roles to look at policies and procedures that had been in place for years and search for ways to make improvements. Moreover, participants observed that the generational shift in the workplace affected some cultural changes within the subject organizations that were necessary to meet the needs of the modern workforce. Ultimately, all the organizations' employees benefitted from these changes, such as flexible time, the ability to work from home or other location outside of the office, and improved transparency and communication from upper management. Participants felt that the both employees and the organization shared the tangible benefits from these changes.

Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to determine the current best practices for organizational socialization for new employees and examine if and how these practices have adjusted in response to the millennial generation's entrance to the labor market. Results of the interviews indicate that the socialization tactics utilized in today's workplace are strongly tied to content based in technology and social tactics supported by

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the use of mentors and colleagues, and that many organizations have made significant changes to their socialization practices to accommodate the workforce's youngest generation.

The heavy use of technology in onboarding is notable, as it is an indicator of how much the modern world relies on technology to connect to one another. Directing newcomers to an intranet sites or other knowledge repository for company information or utilizing web-based programs for training may on its face appear to be rather isolating because it lacks the factor of human interface. It is actually a representation of how people, and in particular Millennials, are accustomed to acquiring information and interacting with the world around them. *Want to know more about a particular subject?* Go to Google or another search engine. *Want to know how to do something?* Check YouTube. Searching websites for content and how-to videos is commonplace and comfortable. When considering the use of web-based content and training exercises from this perspective, it makes sense that organizations would utilize these tools for such purposes. Given the rise of social media in connecting people on a global level (digitalmarketinginstitute.com, 2016); it is also not surprising that organizations would adopt one or more of these platforms to connect its employees to one another and the company itself.

Based on the current findings, technology is an important part of strong onboarding and socialization processes, and the presence of a hyper-connected generation is one factor driving employers to explore and embrace technological advances and additional ways to connect its employees. Intranet sites, web-based training/education

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programs, and social media platforms provide centralized sources for company news, information, policies and procedures, and a way to connect to colleagues.

Another finding of value was the reliance on social tactics for integrating and engaging newcomers, as the use of supervisors or colleagues to support new employees is frequently associated with positive outcomes for socialization (Major, et al., 1995; Chapman, 2008). The results of the interviews indicated that the availability of a mentor or buddy to help newcomers navigate the organization and make introductions facilitated an easier adjustment for the new employees. While the implementation of the mentorship or buddy programs was not specifically prescribed to the needs of Millennials, it is certainly a method that connects well with the youngest generation in the workforce, who often express a desire for mentors or close relationships with supervisors and colleagues (Barsh, et al., 2016). Similarly, other programs that promote networking and relationship-building were also identified as being positive factors for socialization and supportive of the overall goal for helping new hires connect socially with existing employees.

Historically, research identified social tactics as being the most valuable for successful organizational socialization (Bauer and Green, 1994, Ashforth and Saks, 1996, Saks & Gruman, 2011). Given their prevalence, it is clear that today's social support practices are rooted firmly in the early research fundamentals of serial and investiture tactics and those remain relevant (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Jones, 1986). Based on observations that younger generations of workers enjoy the prospect of mentor relationships or other close professional relationships for career guidance and support

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(Anderson, et al., 2016), it appears that organizations will continue to utilize these types of programs in their business plans.

The fact that so many of the organizations provided new hires with guides or "road maps" for their onboard progress was of value. Past research supported the positive implications of fixed tactics that informed newcomers of how they were progressing, as well as the sequence of activities and learning experiences to which they will be exposed (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Jones, 1986). Practices that offered new employees insight into their initial months on the job, such as the 30-60-90 day plan, helped to eliminate some of the anxiety and role ambiguity associated with beginning a new role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Korte, et al., 2015;).

The interviews indicated that this practice was particularly influential when onboarding the younger generation. Barsh et al. (2016) found that the organizations' experience with Millennials was consistent with common descriptions of that generation, which is that they desire high levels of communication and expect frequent feedback, as well as that they want clear roadmaps for their progress. Such practices are undoubtedly beneficial for both the organization and new hires. Clear and open communication channels at the beginning of a relationship are helpful in eliminating surprises or confusion over expectations, thus contributing to better retention rates (Louis, 1980).

While the level of formality in orientation varied, organizations recognized the importance of structure and uniform execution in onboarding techniques. They adhered to such in efforts to maintain consistency, supporting the theory that a more formal approach to socialization is more successful in producing desired outcomes (Van Maanen

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& Schein, 1979; Jones, 1986). Due to the increased use of technology as a source for company information and training, the trend appears to be more individualistic than collective in the onboarding experience. However, one could argue that the fact that organizations provided all new employees with the same centralized sources of information, there is a collective element to the practice.

The present research indicated that the use of technology, social support and frequent and open communication were persistent themes in the organizational socialization practices of today. Many organizations have made significant changes to onboarding and socialization practices to respond to the arrival of Millennials in the workforce. While the evolution of these practices may have seemed forced as organizations struggled to accommodate the youngest generation of workers and fight turnover, the result is a strong set of socialization practices that are beneficial to all generations in the workplace, as well as the organizations themselves.

Limitations/Future Research

One of the more obvious limitations to the research conducted is the small sample of interview subjects. While the sample provided an appropriate level of information for the purposes of this study, a larger sample of interview subjects from a larger pool of organizations, varying in size would undoubtedly yield a wider variety of responses. The information collected from an expanded sampling size could offer additional insight into common best practices, such as how organizations go about developing and implementing successful orientation programs.

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Another limitation was the timeframe for the interviews. Future research may attempt to obtain comparable data using a longer interview format. While it could prove challenging to demand more than 30 minutes of availability from participants, a longer interview could potentially provide additional insights and information to participants' experiences with various socialization practices and observations about the intergenerational workforce.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research are of value because they indicate that the fundamental theories Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Jones (1986) put forth are still relevant today. While technology has certainly evolved and organizations are obviously very different in terms of how they operate than they were during the time of those earlier studies, the basis of socialization practices remain rooted in the models and categorizations that provided the early foundation for organizational socialization.

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Appendix A

<u>Interview Questions</u>

1. Does your organization have an orientation program and could you please describe the structure?

2. What information is covered in your orientation program?

3. Does the orientation program consciously control the inflow of information to new hires to avoid overload? How much is technology utilized in the onboarding/orientation process?

4. Are newcomers segregated from the rest of the organizational staff for a period of time when they first begin? How are they integrated once the time comes for them to join their team?

5. Does the program encourage and help newcomers to build important professional relationships? How is this accomplished?

6. Can you explain the development and implementation of the orientation program?

7. Does the organization have clear goals for the orientation program? How are these goals articulated and shared with those involved in the implementation of the program?

8. Do you have measures for success for your orientation program? Please describe and rank in order of importance.

9. How often is the program reviewed and by whom?

10. Have you made any significant changes to your program in the last 5 years to meet the needs or expectations of the youngest generation entering the workforce?

11. Has the organization modified any parts of its culture or standard socialization efforts to accommodate the needs and expectations of those younger workforce participants?

12. What kind of onboarding or orientation challenges do you think organizations need to address in order to achieve successful socialization for all employees, and how have these challenges changed over the past 5 years?

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