



**ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESS  
IN SMALL COMPANIES IN FINLAND**  
**A study from newcomer's perspective**

Master's Thesis  
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Innovation Management  
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# ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

According to Batistič and Kaše (2015), organizational socialization has been paid more attention in business research and gradually proven to be the important topic for practitioners. Research around this organizational socialization process is constantly conducted from different angles. However, the research about it in small companies is still limited. There are several studies about this topic in Finland but only on a single case and from a company's perspectives. Therefore, this thesis focused on the organizational socialization process in small companies in Finland through one of their newcomers’ perspectives, to figure out successful and novel practices.

The research was conducted by semi-structured interviews with nine participants from nine small companies in Finland. They joined their companies fewer than six months prior to the time of interview. The interviews focused on (1) what has been included in their organizational socialization process (or ‘onboarding’ according to participants), (2) what their companies did to support the process, (3) what they did to facilitate it, and (4) what could have been done differently. The grounded theory research was used to find successful and novel tactics used by companies and newcomers through newcomers’ stories. Patterns and variations were identified through the coding exercise based on themes, grouping, and sorting.

Findings from the interview data were categorized into two main groups: newcomer’s tactics and company’s tactics under newcomer’s perspectives. The newcomer’s tactics include ‘expectation setting’, ‘adaptation’, ‘work ownership’, and ‘relationship building’. The company’s tactics under newcomer’s perspectives include ‘provide basic info’, ‘quick hands-on work’, ‘trust and autonomy’, and ‘emotional support and networking’. About newcomer’s development areas, the participants thought that they could have ‘organized their time or schedule better’, ‘made their responsibilities clearer to others’, and ‘asked more’. They also thought that their companies could have organized the process better: ‘have a simple process and structure for onboarding’, ‘provide an introduction about company’s product(s)’, ‘have proper documentation’, ‘communicate the expectation in detailed level and make it as clear and early as possible’, and ‘have frequent check-in and feedback sessions’. Through the data analysis, most of the tactics were mentioned in previous research. Nonetheless, there are interesting ones that were considered important by newcomers, namely ‘expectation setting’, ‘giving trust and autonomy’ and ‘quick hands-on work’. There are also tactics that were more likely used by the more experienced newcomers than the less experienced ones, and vice versa. A design of organizational socialization process was proposed based on the inputs from participants and previous research. It should have a simple structure of process, proper introduction about company and product(s), good documentation, expectation setting, quick hands-on work, trust and autonomy, clear and frequent communication, feedback and performance discussion.

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**Keywords** organizational socialization process, onboarding, induction, small company, Finland, tactics, newcomer

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Research objectives

Working in Human Resource and Talent Acquisition for both medium and large companies for a few years, I have seen people management practices, in general, and employee journey processes, in particular, vary significantly across companies and industries. Size, resources, human resource practices, and leader's philosophy matter as they make an impact on how employees experience their journey. Studying in the Master's Program in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management, I had chances to explore the start-up world, to get to know how small-sized companies operate. With much fewer resources compared to bigger companies, to manage and motivate people well is difficult, but not impossible.

The labor market has been more competitive than ever, making it even harder for small companies to draw talents and keep them staying happily for a few years. Research shows that US workers changed their jobs on average 10.2 times over a 20-year period (Batistic & Kaše, 2015), meaning they changed jobs approximately every 2 years. Finland is a much smaller labor market than the US. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, the US has slightly over 200 million people in the working age (15 – 64 years old) in 2020 (2020). In comparison, Finland had slightly over 4 million, aged 15 to 74 in 2019 (Statistics Finland, 2019). Some popular professions, such as marketing or software development, also find it challenging to hire suitable people within the country. Nowadays, many companies in Finland have to import talents from abroad, with much higher cost of relocation and risk of cultural differences and languages. There is a high chance that people find it hard to integrate into the society or their spouses could not find a job due to lack of local language skills, as a result, ending up leaving Finland after a short period of time. The more niche the areas are, the more difficult it is to find jobs. Hence, keeping people happy, staying as long as possible while contributing at their best, is now considered a crucial strategy.

How do small companies retain their people with limited resources, especially in an early phase? How do they compete with big companies? These are some questions, among others, that came to my mind. I have observed from my professional experience that it eventually comes down to a simple principle: give people the motivations they need. On one hand, big companies seem to provide a more stable job and established processes. On the other, depending on perspectives, small companies have certain advantages, such as less politics, more freedom on doing their own work and making decisions, fewer processes and rules. In

small companies, even though not being the founder or holding a critical role, one may have chances to acquire shares which can turn into profit if their company is doing well in the following years. Setting aside the monetary motivation, processes and freedom, employees naturally tend to stay longer if they feel connected to the work environment and their colleagues. Retaining people is a big topic that every company tries to come up with their own solutions fitting their own circumstances, and continues polishing or adapting the solutions as the world is changing quickly.

If we look at employment as a journey to explore a new land, in my view, retaining people should come from the beginning of an employment - beginning of the journey. Many studies show that the organizational socialization process happening during the beginning of the employ is important to reduce ambiguity and stress during this early stage and as a result, enhances performance and productivity. Ineffective socialization is the primary reason why newcomers quit their jobs early.

Understanding how to design the beginning of the socialization process is the key to retain people. It helps to maintain a positive feeling, which builds up energy and motivation for the rest of the journey. This is very broad since how the beginning of employment varies per industry, per social norm in different countries, per company size, per HR practice and philosophy, and per resource. In addition, how the socialization process can be designed depends on the perspective of the organization representatives – HR, supervisor, management – and of the newcomers themselves.

According to Batistič and Kaše (2015), organizational socialization has been paid more attention in business research and gradually proven to be the important topic for practitioners. Research around this organizational socialization process is constantly conducted from different angles. However, the research about it in small companies is still limited. There are several studies about this topic in Finland but only on a single case and from a company's perspectives. Therefore, I would like to focus my study about the organizational socialization process in small companies in Finland through one of their newcomers' perspectives, to figure out successful and novel practices.

The research was conducted by semi-structured interviews with nine participants. They joined their companies fewer than six months prior to the time of interview. This is to ensure that the experience can be recalled closely to reality as much as possible. The nine companies were chosen based on their industries and age. This research was expected to find out



whether the companies and the newcomers have been using any successful and novel strategies, and in the end, propose suggestions to make it better in general.

## **1.2. Structure of the thesis**

The following section reviews previous research and studies about the organizational socialization in small companies and the tactics companies and newcomers use to make the process enjoyable and productive.

The Methods and data section will demonstrate the methodology in which data is collected and analyzed. Data analysis will be mentioned in detail, with introduction of companies and interviewees, giving an overview of the sample, with absolute confidentiality of their personal information. It also discusses briefly the trustworthiness of this study.

After that, the finding section discusses main take-aways from the data collection. Discussion and Conclusion present in the end the implications for theory and practice, limitation of the study and suggestions for further research. This may provide companies with some insights and recommendations of good practice which can be adopted for their organizational socialization process.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Organizational socialization process in companies

Many studies show that the organizational socialization process, often happened at the beginning of an employment, is important to reduce ambiguity and stress. As a result, it enhances performance and productivity by allowing the new joiners to focus on task performance sooner (Solinger et al., 2013). The successful process also helps to increase a sense of belonging, reducing voluntary turnover in the long run. Research also shows that ineffective socialization is the primary reason why organizational newcomers quit their jobs (Field & Coetzer, 2011).

To begin with, there are several academic definitions of organizational socialization process. They are summarized in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Review definitions of organizational socialization process in previous researches*

Definition	Source
“Organisational socialisation (OS) has been defined as ‘the process by which one is taught and learns “the ropes” of a particular organisational role’ (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211), focusing on how individuals adapt to performance proficiency, people, politics, language, organisational goals and values and history of an organization (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).”	<i>Matuszewski &amp; Blenkinsopp (2011), p.79</i>
“Organizational socialization is the process through which new employees learn the skills, expected behaviours and values needed to become organizational members (Van Maanen and Schein 1979).”	<i>Hatmaker (2015), p.1147</i>
“Organizational socialization is the process by which "a person secures relevant job skills, acquires a functional level of organizational understanding, attains supportive social interactions with coworkers, and generally accepts the established ways of a particular organization"	<i>Wanberg &amp; Kammeyer-Mueller (2000), p.373</i>

Onboarding is “the process of helping new hires adjust to social and performance aspects of their new jobs, (Bauer, 2010, p.1).”	<i>Meyer &amp; Bartels (2017), p.10</i>
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These definitions have a common theme. They conceptualize socialization as the process through which new joiners learn about the organization in order to perform their work at their best.

In practice, the more common name ‘on-boarding process’ is usually used for the period of introducing newcomers to the organization, its people, its own norms, and at the same time preparing the newcomers to be “engaged and productive in their positions” (Stephenson, 2015, p.26). Generally speaking, the process is seen in companies of all sizes. However, its scope, length, and implementation depend significantly on the company’s philosophy, human resources, and experience of the supervisor for the newcomers in charge of the organizational socialization process.

There have been three approaches to researching organizational socialization: organizational stage approach, organizational approach, and individual approach (Batistic & Kaše, 2015, p.8).

*Table 2: Three approaches of organizational socialization research*

Approach	Description
Organizational stage approach	Demonstrates newcomer’s experiences during different stages of socialization, starting with being able to anticipate what may happen, then encountering challenges, and finally acquiring info/ skills and making changes. From there, it shows what organizations can do to offer new hires the desired outcome of socialization. (Batistic & Kaše, 2015, p.8)
Organizational approach	Was developed from the six bipolar socialization tactics (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) which companies often use to design the organizational socialization process, including <i>collective vs. individual, formal vs. informal, sequential vs. random steps, fixed vs. variable, serial vs. disjunctive, and investiture vs. divestiture</i> . (Batistic & Kaše, 2015, p.8)

Individual approach	“the newcomers themselves can also be proactive as they hope to climb on board the organization successfully (Saks & Ashforth, 1996); this view emphasizes individuals’ information and feedback seeking, along with relationship and network building (Morrison, 1993b; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).” (Batistic & Kaše, 2015, p.8)
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These approaches look at the organizational socialization process from different angles, including (1) using newcomer’s experiences to design the desired state of socialization process, (2) using tactics that are based on characteristics of the industry, company, and work, and (3) newcomer’s strategies to make their own process successful. The following section will review in more detailed the socialization tactics, including organization tactics and individual tactics.

As shown above, the process requires at least the participation of two main parties: newcomer and the company. The company, in this context and this research, is represented by HR and office people, supervisor or direct/ line manager, and management team members. In addition, there are usually the newcomer’s teammates and relevant business critical stakeholders. Each party’s involvement in the process is equally important to the success of the organizational socialization. Section 2.2. will review the research on how each party participates in the process and what tactics they use to make it successful.

## **2.2. Organizational and individual tactics in the socialization process**

Research has shown that both companies and individuals often have their own thoughts, strategy and practice when participating in the process. There are different perspectives across academic studies.

On one hand, the organizational socialization process is described as to be influenced by the organizational strategies and practices, feedback and support from colleagues and stakeholders, and pro-activeness of newcomers (Klein and Heuser (2008), cited in Batistic and Kaše, 2015). On the other hand, the process’s success is also influenced by newcomer’s strategies, including their behaviours and actions, and by newcomer’s personality (Bauer and Erdogan, 2011, cited in Batistic and Kaše, 2015). In this research, both parties’ tactics will be reviewed as they are both important and equally influence the success of the organizational socialization process.

### 2.2.1. Organizational tactics

According to Field and Alan (2011), small companies often use different types of tactics to support newcomers in the organizational socialization process. They often use both formal and informal tactics, given the nature of the companies with small numbers of employees and leaders involved significantly in the process.

Van Maanen and Schein in 1979 proposed six dimensions of the process: ‘collective’ vs. ‘individual’, ‘formal’ vs. ‘informal’, ‘sequential’ vs. ‘random’ steps, ‘fixed’ vs. ‘variable’, ‘serial’ vs. ‘disjunctive’, and ‘investiture’ vs. ‘divestiture’. The below table describes briefly these dimensions.

*Table 3: Six bipolar dimensions of socialization process (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979)*

<b>Pillar 1</b>	<b>Pillar 2</b>
<b>Collective:</b> this tactic’s focus is for a group of newcomers to experience similar steps and activities of the socialization process. It may reflect the same sets of training, same documents and materials, same sets of induction meetings with core teams.	<b>Individual:</b> each newcomer experiences their socialization process differently, tailored to their roles and seniority levels. Hence, this tactic produces specific outcomes in each socialization case.
<b>Formal:</b> this strategy aims to separate newcomers from more tenured employees, and puts them through different sets of socialization activities or programs.	<b>Informal:</b> No programs to separate newcomers from more tenured employees, and focus on learning by doing, trial-and-errors.
<b>Sequential:</b> this tactic is described as “a sequence of discrete and identifiable steps” taken from the beginning of employment in order for newcomers to fully take on the new role.	<b>Random:</b> the steps from the beginning of employment until newcomers’ fully taking the new role are unknown.
<b>Fixed:</b> newcomers are aware of the precise length of the socialization process and when it is completed.	<b>Variable:</b> few clues are given to newcomers about the length of the socialization process and when it is completed.

<b>Pillar 1</b>	<b>Pillar 2</b>
<p><b>Serial:</b> newcomers shadow more experienced employees in the companies and expected to take similar kinds of roles. The experienced employees act as role models.</p>	<p><b>Disjunctive:</b> meant to be the opposite to the serial strategy. “No role models are available to recruits to inform them as to how they are to proceed in the new role”. (p. 60)</p>
<p><b>Investiture:</b> this tactic emphasizes the personal characteristics of newcomers and the companies do not force newcomers to change to adapt to new environments.</p>	<p><b>Divestiture:</b> in this tactic, those managing the socialization “seek to deny and strip away certain personal characteristics of a recruit” and aim to blend them in the company’s culture and practice. (p. 64)</p>

There are a lot of research around the six bipolar models of socialization tactics proposed by Van Maanen and Schein’s (1979). For example, Saks & Alan (1996) studied and extended the model to assess how those tactics together influenced the “work adjustment of recent business school graduates after four and ten months in their new jobs”. On a different angle, Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) conducted their research to identify other tactics used by experienced newcomers, while arguing that the Van Maanen and Schein’s model is applicable and useful more for freshly graduated newcomers than experienced ones.

For fifteen years (from 1985 to 2000), Griffin et al. (2000) mentioned in their study that there have been two issues concentrated in organizational socialization research, namely “interactionist perspective” and “both a conceptual and empirical concern with the proactive socialization techniques” used by newcomers. In the research, Griffin et al. put on the interaction hat and developed a model that shows how the socialization strategies “impact on and interact with newcomer pro-active socialization tactics to influence socialization outcomes”. The research inspired me to look at the socialization process from different angles and consider the participation of each party equally important to make the process successful.

In addition, Saks & Ashforth (2002) studied the relationships between the tactics mentioned in the model, “newcomers’ information acquisition (i.e. feedback and observation) and socialization outcomes”. To be more detailed, Filstad (2011) used the model to research how the tactics influenced the “newcomers’ organizational commitment and learning processes”.

These studies went deep into specific areas of the socialization process and its outcome, giving me a deeper understanding of the topic and know which areas were researched on and what can be explored more.

### 2.2.2. Individual tactics

As a main party in the socialization process, newcomers have their own tactics. It often happens in such a way that in the beginning of the process, they feel overwhelmed with too much information to take in. Even in small companies with usually smaller amounts of information, when compared to larger ones, it still requires newcomers to find a way of how to navigate the known and the unknown. There is also pressure they create for themselves when trying hard to prove their capabilities with new responsibilities in a new working environment.

In contrast with a number of research conducted on organization tactics, research on individual tactics is still limited. Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) identified strategies of self-determined, observational and mutual development through their research. Self-determined strategies include ‘minimizing’, ‘proving’, ‘giving’, and ‘role modelling’. Observational strategies include ‘gathering’, ‘waiting’; ‘following’; ‘attending’; ‘asking’; and ‘reading’. Mutual development includes ‘teaming’, ‘befriending’, ‘exchanging’, ‘flattering’, and ‘talking’. The table below describes what each strategy includes.

*Table 4: Self-determined, observational, mutual development strategies (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012)*

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Self-determined	Minimizing	Newcomers take action to “reduce the amount of new learning required”, for example, by using their already-acquired knowledge and skills and still make sure they deliver as expected or beyond. This is often used by experienced newcomers as they have had a foundation.
	Proving	Newcomers use ‘proving’ strategy to make their way into the new environment, catching the attention of their colleagues, by showing their

Strategy	Sub-category	Description
		capabilities in given or voluntary tasks. This is applied by all types of newcomers as proving themselves in the new position makes an impact on their chance and decision of staying in the company after the socialization process.
	Giving	Newcomers give their expertise or knowledge to the ones interacting with them in a work context, for example, contributing to the team's work, increasing productivity and performance, or simply knowledge sharing and adoption. This often comes from experienced newcomers.
	Role-modelling	Newcomers use their colleagues as role models of how a good performance looks like and try to mimic their behaviours and working styles. This is often applied by freshly graduated newcomers in apprenticeship, traineeship, or mentoring programs.
Observational	Gathering and waiting	Newcomers gather information from different channels, such as their supervisor, peers, subordinates (if applicable), other internal and external stakeholders, company's documentation and internal portal. Waiting for information means that the newcomers react to information that they do not proactively seek themselves. This is applied by all types of newcomers. However the more experienced they are, the more efficiently they do it.
	Following	Newcomers follow their more experienced colleagues to define what needs to be done and how. The less experienced the newcomers are, the more they use this 'following' strategy.



Strategy	Sub-category	Description
	Attending	Newcomers participate in formal training, induction meetings, department meetings, team meetings.
	Asking	Newcomers ask for information and seek for feedback.
	Reading	Newcomers spend time on reading the company's documents from internal portals, product manuals or documentation, job-related news or websites.
Mutual development	Teaming	With their own team, newcomers influence the way others perceive them and their work under their team's perspective. They show their commitment to their team and others see the work as a team's effort.
	Befriending	Newcomers also influence how others perceive them. They use this strategy not only for their own teams but also for other teams in order to build an internal network. They focus on setting up social relationships which could be helpful for work situations.
	Exchanging	Newcomers use their knowledge and network to exchange resources with their colleagues with preferable tasks or favour. This is usually used by more experienced newcomers than the freshly graduated ones.
	Flattering	Newcomers use their words or actions to make their colleagues happy about themselves so that they can positively engage in the relationship with newcomers, for instance, asking their colleagues questions in a way that makes them feel useful.

Strategy	Sub-category	Description
	Negotiating	Newcomers discuss their colleagues' expectation of their roles and vice versa. The more experienced the newcomers are, the more skilfully they negotiate.
	Talking	Newcomers talk to other people to pick up or seek information and build their network and relationship. This sounds like a simple strategy but doing it skilfully requires experience, knowledge, and certain types of personalities.

It is important to note that newcomers' colleagues are mentioned in almost all of the strategies used by newcomers described in Table 4. For the success of the newcomers' organizational socialization, the colleagues play a vital role. They can significantly contribute to the design of the working environment to "maximize learning and adjustment opportunities for newcomers" (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012, p. 50). There are useful things which can be done by colleagues, such as "providing relevant reading materials" or "informal guidance". For instance, colleagues can provide some relevant presentations that are not easy to find from their intranet or introduce the unwritten norms or history of a specific team or line of work.

In 2018, Mornata & Cassar took a more specific angle of newcomers' strategies. The angle focused on the strategies used when feeling that the support from the company is inadequate. One of them is perceiving the information implicitly as guidance through informal occasions with colleagues, who they feel they can have psychological safety with.

### **2.3. Organizational socialization process in small companies**

#### **2.3.1. Small company's common characteristics**

The definition of small-sized companies, or small companies, has been seen consistent across research in Europe. It is defined as "companies which employ fewer than 50 employees and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total does not exceed 10 million euros" (Poli, 2013). These companies often have flatter structure and fewer middle manager layers compared to bigger ones.

According to Holátová and Březinová (2013), some popular goals that small companies often focus on are, for example, ensuring product's quality, gaining profit, and maintaining stability. By staying small, they have certain competitive advantages over the medium and large sized companies, such as quality of labor and flexibility.

The first advantage is quality of labor. Since these small companies have fewer than 50 people, everyone counts, they – the leadership team – can and want to have capacity to influence the quality of new hires. They may source candidates directly or are involved in interviews to make sure values are aligned and requirements are met. The second one is flexibility. In large companies, making a change to a policy, process, or practice may take weeks or months due to the inevitable bureaucracy and hierarchy. In small sized ones, it can be days or even less. There are fewer people to get approval and each employee, on average, has bigger decision making power than that in larger sized companies. Small companies can be much more agile.

Nevertheless, in the same research done by Holátová and Březinová (2013), small companies are also described as having some weak sides, to name a few: a hard competition, insolvency or instability.

Competition with big companies can be very challenging. Usually with less capital and man power, in addition to less product range – revenue depends on a single line of product which creates high risk for company existence, small companies have to fight an unbalanced battle in the market if their product is not unique enough. Besides, being able to maintain a good cash flow and profit margin depends significantly on people and product, and how the company competes with their competitors. It is a two-way situation: good people can commit as long as they find motivation. Good people cannot stay if the company cannot meet their needs. According to several citations mentioned in Field & Coetzer's research (2011), attracting and retaining talented employees is a constant challenge for small companies, especially for the ones in small cities or rural areas (Mayson & Barrett, 2006, cited in Field & Coetzer, 2011). In addition, it is more challenging for small companies than the larger ones to offer “formal training and development” and “career development” (Field & Coetzer, 2011), which are, to most people, an important factor of work. Hence, once being able to hire good people, retaining them is another challenging factor that small companies have to focus on.

### 2.3.2. Organizational socialization process in small companies

The organizational socialization process in larger companies is often more formal than that in small ones. Size of a company matters when choosing an approach of the socialization process (Field & Coetzer, 2011). Since small companies have fewer than 50 people, people involved in the process are usually Office/ HR/ Admin person, supervisor of a newcomer, some team members, and the leadership team. With its flatter structure, leaders in these companies usually take part in these organizational socialization activities more than those in bigger ones. They could be the ones walking newcomers through the company introduction and product onboarding, which are often done by different teams in the medium- and large-sized companies. These people in small companies also have decision making power on how they would like to organize their participation in the onboarding, its timeline and content.

According to Field & Coetzer (2011), the organizational socialization process poses challenges for both companies and newcomers. For companies, the newcomer is a new addition to the organization, which mutually impacts each other's performance, efficiency, and productivity. Relevant stakeholders of the newcomer will be affected one way or another. It is not just the newcomer who needs to learn new things. Other involved parties need to learn about the newcomer and how to work together, as everyone has their own personalities and working styles.

For employees, a new job means a new unknown and unfamiliar environment, which requires them to adjust using existing and newly acquired knowledge and skills. Even if the newcomer does a similar job as in their previous companies, new context – industry, product, people, ways of working, culture – still requires them to adapt their competencies and ways of working to the new environment. With a large amount of new information to take in and process in a short period of time, and the need to simultaneously use the information to perform well, newcomers' feeling overwhelmed is commonly seen.

With these challenges, each side often comes up with strategies, or tactics to tackle the challenges in their own way.

### 2.3.3. Organizational socialization tactics used in small companies

Usually, companies use tactics from both pillars, even both pillars of a single dimension, in the six bipolar dimensions of socialization process (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979)

described in Table 3. Not much is surely known about onboarding in small companies. As a starting point, it might be assumed that, with the nature of small companies, ‘individual tactics’ are often used more than ‘collective tactics’, since they do not have many people joining in the same program or same role. However, mature small companies also use a ‘collective approach’ where they have several newcomers joining at the same time and put them through more or less the same process with some specific difference tailored to their roles.

Using more of the second pillar also is seen in the second dimension ‘formal’ – ‘informal’ with the socialization process in small companies. They rarely have human and financial resources to put newcomers through some sets of programs. Sometimes the newcomer is the only one doing that line of work in the company, hence onboarding through trial-and-error would be more productive and efficient than the formal method.

The ‘sequential strategy’ is often used in large companies where training programs, traineeship, and management programs are organized. These programs are designed and thought through to nurture certain types of roles in the organizations. These roles may not easily find suitable candidates; hence this strategy comes in handy. Small companies often do not have enough resources to build this program or use external service.

Based on the definition, the ‘fixed strategy’, similar to sequential strategy, is often applied to traineeship or management programs where the newcomers know exactly the length of the socialization process and what is included. This is hardly seen in small companies. Instead, the ‘variable tactic’ is more popular.

The two strategy dimensions ‘Serial’ vs. ‘Disjunctive’ and ‘Investiture’ vs. ‘Divestiture’ are used variedly by small companies depending on the role, number of employees in a similar role and its practices. Some companies may want any newcomer to fit in the current culture and they would use ‘divestiture’ tactics. For example, they might engage in “harassment from experienced members” or ask newcomers to do dirty work for a long time, e.g. the work that pays low and is of low status (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979, p. 64).

In sum, it looks that in practice, socialization processes in small companies often follow the second pillar of these dimensions, as explained in Table 3.

The strategies used by individuals joining small companies seem not to be mentioned particularly. The tactics and the support from HR and colleagues differ among companies,

given their sizes, industries, practice, culture. The tactics used by newcomers also differ due to differences of personality, working experience, knowledge, skills, and working style.

From the review of previous studies, it can be seen that there were many studies focusing on organizational socialization process, on its tactics to succeed, on the process of single cases. There are several studies about the organizational socialization process in Finland but only in one single case. Generally, the study about this topic in small companies is still limited, and there is no study about the socialization process in small companies in Finland from the newcomer's perspectives.

In this thesis, the research focuses on exploring the organizational socialization process in small companies in Finland through one of their newcomers' perspectives, to figure out whether there is any exciting and novel tactic arising from company's practice or newcomer. The strategies used by newcomers and by company under the newcomer's perspective will be analysed and discussed.

## **3. METHODS AND DATA**

### **3.1. Methods**

From the research and articles available in entrepreneurship studies, qualitative research is proven to be a common method to make sense of human thoughts and experience - which often is complex. According to Pervez Ghauri and Kjell Gronhaug (2005) (cited in Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), qualitative research becomes valuable when prior known insights are limited. Hence, qualitative research is rather “exploratory and flexible”. In this thesis, this methodology is used to facilitate better the purpose of the research: explore the experience of newcomers going through the organizational socialization process in small companies. It helps me understand the difference in experience and perspective of newcomers in a seemingly similar process. This approach also allows me to go deeper into each individual’s experience and identify what makes them satisfied and what could be improved, making each experience useful for general purposes.

The two researchers Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) introduced nine approaches doing qualitative research in business study context: case study, ethnographic, grounded theory, focus group, action, narrative, discursive, critical, and feminist. For this thesis, I have chosen the grounded theory approach. The reason is that it helps to identify patterns and variations, to allow concepts and theory emerged from data (Myers, 2013). As a result, it will allow me to figure out if there are any new or exciting tactics used by newcomers or companies under newcomers’ perspectives.

#### **3.1.1. Grounded theory research in this thesis**

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, p.156), the grounded theory methodology is “described as a highly developed idea consisting of a set of formally named and described procedures”, which generates a theory of a social phenomenon through data analysis. The methodology is well suited in the field of organizational theory, where it can help to capture complicated situations, which then are connected with practices and actions, and finally provide alternative realistic perspectives for a well-established field (Locke, 2011, cited in Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

For this thesis, the grounded theory research fits well with the purpose of finding successful and novel tactics for the organizational socialization process through newcomers’ stories. The socialization process is a complex context and can be perceived differently among

parties in the same organization. It is also a well-established research field which was given due attention during the past 30 years. Through newcomers' stories and views, the strategies used generally in the socialization process can be clarified for small companies. Patterns and variations will be identified through the coding exercise based on themes, grouping, and sorting.

In the beginning of the thesis work, I went through previous research to figure out what has already been studied in this topic and what is missing. After narrowing down the fields and finalizing the research questions, I decided to use interview data as the primary data source. Since one of the purposes is to study the experience, semi-structured interviews are better than structured interviews, leaving room for personal story or approach and follow-up.

There are several criteria used to define which types of companies and newcomers chosen to conduct interview with, namely total headcount of the company (any ranged from 10 to 50, which meets the requirement of small-sized ones), diverse industry, diverse age range of companies, good balance in number of experienced newcomers and the less experienced, and good balance in number of local and immigrant newcomers.

To understand the newcomers' experience better, their experience's context is studied. They are asked to compare their current experience with the previous one(s). Their background is also studied in order to understand their expectation and how they manage the expectation in the current process. The company's background is also studied in order to make sense of the similarity and difference in experience among participants.

## **3.2. Data analysis**

### **3.2.1. Data collection**

Interviewing is one of the most common methods of collecting qualitative data (Myers, 2013), especially in case study research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In this thesis, in-depth interviews are considered primary data. The face-to-face interviews allow me to obtain information that written materials and surveys cannot provide. For instance, emotions of interviewees and how they tell their stories are very important in studying the experience. This is backed up by Rubin and Rubin (2005: vii cited in Myers, 2013, p.119) in that interviews enable us "to see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is looked at but seldom seen". The interviews will be mainly guided and semi-structured, that



gives interviewees – in this case newcomers of their companies - flexibility to tell their stories but still provides the information I need.

I have intentionally targeted white-collar newcomers in companies that everyone is doing office work since this is the setting that I am familiar with. This helps to maximize the knowledge acquired from my previous working experience. At first, I created the first draft of a questionnaire based on what I would like to explore about the experience, and asked my friend to act as an interviewee to give feedback on the question set and flow. After revising based on the feedback, I received inputs from my thesis supervisor on how to make it more fluid and simpler for participants to answer. When the questionnaire was finalized, I started to find participants through my network at school and at work. The purpose is for them to share their stories with me as comfortably as possible. My goal was to find the most diverse group possible, including the company's industry, age, number of people, working experience of participants, and origin (whether they are originally from Finland or not). It helped to look at the topic from different angles.

There are nine newcomers participating in the research. Names and professions of participants are anonymous. All participants had been working with their current companies for at least one month and no longer than six months. Half-hour to an hour semi-structured interviews were conducted at a meeting room from the newcomers' company or mine. Length of interviews varied between interviewees, depending mainly on how rich the experience was and how vividly they could recall it. Semi-structured interviews are defined as “the use of some pre-formulated questions but no strict adherence to them. New questions might emerge during conversation” (Myers, 2013, p.121). The structure helped to maintain the consistency of the interview data across participants.

In the interview data, the main points are: tenure length in their current companies, what has been included in their organizational socialization process, what their companies did to support the process, what they did to facilitate it, what could have been done differently. The interview questions started with an ice-breaking introduction, especially for the participants that have not known the researcher before. I then briefly introduced the research purpose and what I would like to take from the interview. I also informed the participants that their names and positions are anonymous and ask for their permission to record the interview. 100% of participants agreed to be on record. The questions went from general to specific, and are mostly open-ended in order for me to get as much information as possible. The ‘organizational socialization process’ is referred to as an ‘onboarding process’ in the

interviews since in practice, the term onboarding is more frequently used. The first question is about their roles and their general feeling so far. Then, they are asked to rewind their journey from the start and tell what they can remember. The following questions dive deeper into their expectations, feelings, and how the experience compares to the expectations. When they start to reflect on their own experience and action, they are asked about the detailed activities, from their own side and from the company's side. They are also asked to reflect on what went well, what could be improved, and how their current socialization process compares to the previous experience. To end this part, I ask them to share how the socialization process impacts their decision to continue staying in the companies.

The last part is to get some general information about the company, partly to verify the company's information found in their website and also to assess how well the newcomers remember the basics of their company during the first months.

### 3.2.2. Data analysis

In grounded theory research, the coding process is an important part of data analysis, which consists of three steps, namely "open coding", "axial coding", "selective coding" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p. 161,162). Open coding is to go through the data line by line, break the whole piece into smaller parts, then categorize, group, and compare them. With axial coding, all groups are transferred to a separate place, away from the original set of data. From that, patterns and variations are identified and compared. Finally, one or several categories are selected to be conceptualized, which belongs to the selective coding step.

With the research's purpose of exploring experience, feeling, and techniques used in the process, the focus of analysis in this thesis will be 'meaning' – what is told in the interviews. In order to analyze the meaning of the data, a popular method is based on theme or pattern (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2017) also supports this technique for the purpose of identifying patterns in relation to participants' experience and perspectives and seeking to understand what participants think, feel, and do.

Hence, the data in this thesis was also analyzed based on themes. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen, (2008), there are two different meanings of thematic analysis. The first one is to develop a storyline to integrate themes (found in empirical data: interviews) into meaningful stories. The second one is to study the narrative of the interviewees to find patterns of themes. This thesis is suitable with the latter alternative when stories of newcomers are analyzed to find patterns of expectation, experience, satisfaction, and tactics.

The following part will demonstrate the steps of how data was analyzed in this thesis, with the combination of the coding process and thematic analysis.

### 3.2.3. Step-by-step analysis

Following the coding process and thematic analysis, my analysis plan is described in order as below graph.

*Graph 1: Data analysis plan*

Familiarizing data: all records were transcribed text-to-text and read through several times line by line.

Open coding: collect relevant data from the interviews for obvious big themes intended from the set of questions, use color and text format to categorize and group them.

Axial coding: transfer all groups of data to a spreadsheet with each big theme being in a separate tab.

Reviewing big themes: split big themes into subthemes, group and compare them. Identify patterns and variations in each subtheme. Check the relevance among themes.

Defining and naming themes: refine the specifics of each subtheme, and the overall story the analysis tells. Themes are also compared to ensure uniqueness (Copper-Thomas et al, 2011). Select themes for the report and name them.

Producing a report: final analysis of selected themes, relate back to the research question and literature, producing a report of the analysis.

The questions used in the semi-structured interviews with the newcomers were open-ended and broad in the beginning and then questions went into deeper details in the end. The structure was flexible enough to allow participants to freely tell their socialization process at the beginning, which, in some cases, already covered some following questions. A

questionnaire was used to make sure all questions are covered in all interviews. Hence, the answers and stories are not in the same order in each set of data.

Firstly, I transcribed all the nine interview recordings, named each transcript as Participant No.1 to No.9, so that bias can be avoided during the coding and data analysis process. Then, I read through the whole transcript to familiarize myself with the data and spot the obvious big themes as intended with the questionnaire: what tactics newcomers used, what newcomers thought their companies did for their socialization process, and their feelings.

During the open coding step, the whole data was read a second time and coded into those themes, using colors and text format. During this second round, more themes were identified, including the comparison with previous socialization experiences and areas that newcomers could improve or they think their companies should improve.

The next step was axial coding, where all themes were put and categorized into a spreadsheet, with each theme in a separate tab, including 'Company', 'Newcomer', 'Comparison'. Then, a big theme was split into subthemes, summarized up, and compared with one another. The common subthemes in 'Company' and 'Newcomer' were: 'info about company', 'task related', 'stakeholder support', 'relationship building', and 'development areas'. There were two subthemes that were unique for the 'Newcomer' theme, namely 'expectation' and 'newcomer's feeling'. In each subtheme column, similar ones were grouped and made notes of how many times the information came up in the data set. From there, patterns and variations of experience were identified, including outstanding experiences and feelings. The patterns and variations were sorted based on importance and criticality level.

Then, defining and naming themes were followed. In this stage, the specifics of each subtheme were refined, selected, and formed an overall story of the analysis. Each subtheme is named according to its main meaning.

The last step was to produce the report of the analysis where findings were discussed. The analysis tried to answer the following questions as a generalization for further discussion: (1) what is considered as a successful organizational socialization process in small companies and (2) what made newcomers feel unsatisfied.

### 3.2.4. Introduction of studied newcomers and their companies

There were nine participants who were newcomers to their companies at the time of their interviews. Their companies were all based in Finland. Some of them can speak Finnish, the local language, and others do not. All of them spoke English in the interviews. Their companies' official working language is either Finnish or English.

I came to know them from different sources. Some of them are friends, some are colleagues, and some schoolmates. The rest know someone in my network. This has been chosen deliberately to make sure they can share their experience as rich and comfortably as possible.

The table below is the overview of all participants and their companies.

*Table 5: Overview of studied newcomers and their companies (at the time of interview)*

No.	Company's product	Company industry	Founded	No. of people	Participant tenure	Working experience
1	AI- and IoT-based energy optimization software	Energy - technology	2016	40	3 months	Experienced newcomer, same industry with previous job
2	Mobile game, Game research	Gaming	2015	20	4 months	Experienced newcomer, same industry with previous job
3	Trade and investment service	International Trade and Development	2006	26	6 months	Experienced newcomer, new industry
4	Marketplace platform	Internet	2011	20	1 month	Experienced newcomer but totally new to working in Finland
5	Community-driven activities to promote diversity of talents in start-up life	Civic and Social Organization	2016	11	4 months	Experienced newcomer but totally new to working in Finland

No.	Company's product	Company industry	Founded	No. of people	Participant tenure	Working experience
6	Coaching, Training, Corporate values, Leadership	Management Consulting	1997	20	5 months	1 <sup>st</sup> full-time job but held many part-time jobs before
7	Console game	Gaming	2018	20	6 months	Experienced newcomers, same industry with previous job
8	Space and service provider for start-ups	Facilities Services	2016	13	3 months	Experienced newcomers, new industry
9	Recruiting, Interviewing, SaaS	Human Resource	2010	28	5 months	Experienced newcomers, same industry with previous job

### 3.3. Trustworthiness of the study

All participants either know me before as a friend, colleague, or schoolmate, or know someone in my network. This is chosen intentionally in order for them to be comfortable sharing their experience with the current companies, especially when they just joined their companies. Going on record with anonymity helps to comfortably share both sides of the organizational socialization story as well.

The interviews were extensive. The qualitative finding is valuable to have a feeling and overview of the organizational socialization process in small companies in Finland. With the grounded theory methodology, the aim is to find novel practices and strategies. From there, a summary of the good and bad practices can be made into suggestions for small companies when designing their socialization process. However, the sample of nine interviewees is so small that the generalization from the finding will need more verification to be more trustworthy.

## 4. FINDINGS

With the data analysis based on the grounded theory methodology, patterns and variations of experience were identified and summarized. The findings will be presented in three groups: (1) newcomers' tactics, (2) what newcomers saw as company's tactics through their own experience, and (3) observation during interviews.

Generally, the participants had a pleasant feeling towards their onboarding process, or organizational socialization process. They felt welcomed and cared for by their new colleagues. Their supervisors were nice and always willing to help. Some mentioned that they were very excited and had a sense of gratitude because they had a chance to be a part of their companies. They felt very good to be hands-on already during the first week or on day two. The feeling seemed genuine shown by their expression when telling their stories.

The majority of participants said that the organizational socialization process was effective and they felt very good about it. They progressed quickly after a month. Their supervisors organized a feedback session to discuss the performance and feedback from colleagues. The supervisors also asked them to share their thoughts.

*“How [...] effective this onboarding process has been [...] after one month, there has already been like a progress discussion and a feedback opportunity”*

In contrast, some participants found it challenging to navigate among new information without proper documentation or materials. This experience was reported by more senior newcomers. The ones that are not originally from Finland found it difficult to understand Finnish employment basics, such as vacation or salary review. They also did not know where to find information or whom to ask about these subjects.

*“After 1.5 months I still don't know who I can ask about vacation, salary talk. Even [though] the company is young, I expected these things should be in place.”*

It was found from the data set that all participants used several tactics to succeed in their organizational socialization process. Under their point of view, their companies had a strategy to try to onboard them effectively. The following table summarizes tactics used by newcomers and by companies under newcomers' perspective.

*Table 6: Findings – common tactics by newcomers and by companies under newcomers’ perspective*

Tactics by newcomers		Tactics by companies – newcomers’ view	
Expectation setting	For themselves	Provide basic info	Through recruitment and induction
	For others		Documentation
Adaptation	Be proactive		Trainings
	Be open-minded & true to self	Quick hands-on work	Give tasks early
	Ask for feedback & advice		Weekly company and team meetings
Work ownership	Hands-on as soon as possible		Provide shadowing for junior newcomers
	Own the work	Trust and autonomy	Give feedback
	Do more than being asked for		Give trust and autonomy
Relationship building	Participate in informal events	Emotional support and networking	Meet everyone at work and beyond
	Learn people’s names		Be present to newcomers
	Treat colleagues as more than colleagues		Organize informal events and encourage newcomers to join

#### **4.1. Newcomers’ tactics**

The following section will demonstrate the newcomers’ tactics found in the data, namely expectation setting, adaptation, work ownership, relationship building. The following part will discuss how participants reflected themselves on the process and what they could have done differently to improve the experience. The table below describes which newcomers used which tactics in their socialization process.



*Table 7: Summary of newcomers and their tactics*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Newcomers' working experience</b>	<b>Newcomers' tactics used</b>	<b>Company's product</b>	<b>Participant tenure</b>
1	Experienced newcomer, same industry with previous job	Adaptation, Work ownership, Relationship building	Energy optimization	3 months
2	Experienced newcomer, same industry with previous job	Expectation setting, Adaptation, Work ownership	Mobile game, Game research	4 months
3	Experienced newcomer, new industry	Expectation setting, Adaptation, Work ownership	Trade and investment service	6 months
4	Experienced newcomer but totally new to working in Finland	Expectation setting, Adaptation, Work ownership, Relationship building	Marketplace platform	1 month
5	Experienced newcomer but totally new to working in Finland	Adaptation, Work ownership, Relationship building	Community-driven activities to promote diversity of talents in start-up life	4 months
6	1st full-time job but held many part-time positions before	Expectation setting, Adaptation, Work ownership	Coaching, Training, Corporate values, Leadership	5 months
7	Experienced newcomers, same industry with previous job	Adaptation, Work ownership, Relationship building	Console game	6 months
8	Experienced newcomers, new industry	Adaptation, Work ownership, Relationship building	Space and service provider for start-ups	3 months
9	Experienced newcomers, same industry	Expectation setting, Adaptation, Work ownership, Relationship building	Recruiting, Interviewing, SaaS	5 months

#### 4.1.1. Expectation setting

It has been found out from the interview data that the previous experience on organizational socialization and newcomer's background plays a vital role in shaping expectations and tactics used with their current company. In the interviews, there was a question supposedly asked in the end: "How is the onboarding in this company different from your previous experience?". Almost all of the participants mentioned their previous experience and compared them with the current ones before the question was asked. They actively compared the current experience with the previous one(s), and used them to justify the thoughts or expectations they had with the current process. For example, one person used their onboarding process in a big multi-national corporation as an expectation when joining the current start-up. In the big corporate, they had a 2-week induction program carefully organized with extensive agenda and involvement from the CEO to teammates. The experience in their current start-up is drastically different. The participant did not have a proper company introduction nor any concrete program. As a reflection, the person said:

*"That is something I did expect, and I shouldn't have, because it's a startup."*

The expectation about the organizational socialization process started from the interview period, when they knew more about the company, the work, future colleagues and other contexts. The expectation also came from the company's expectation set towards them during the interviews and their first few days of the employment. In general, all participants said that they understood the company's expectation towards them at a higher level but had to figure out the rest of the details later themselves, through their supervisors and colleagues. Only one of them mentioned that expectation and responsibility of the role were made clear at a detailed level.

The majority reported that reality met their expectations. Some people said that they did not know what to expect, hence kept their minds and eyes open. Reasons are that (1) they have never worked for a start-up or small company before and did not know how the beginning of employment there would look like and (2) their previous experience was too horrible that anything would be better.

One person did not expect too much since they knew the company was going through a pivot – re-establishing the company's value, mission, product – therefore there would not be much happening at the beginning. One person said that they expected joining a start-up could be messy or loose, however, the reality was different. Everything was done with great care and thoughtfulness.

*“sometimes you think ... Oh, start-up... they're going to be a little... loose...but that's not the case. Like there's a lot of thought that has gone into stuff here.”*

The majority of them, especially the experienced newcomers, tried to figure out what others expected of them. They met all relevant stakeholders in the company, talked about each other's work and how they could collaborate, including what they were expected to do. This is proven to be helpful in understanding a holistic picture and setting the right expectations to others. This tactic seems to be in line with the ‘Negotiating’ strategy mentioned by Copper-Thomas et al (2011).

This expectation setting helps tremendously to set the right tone for the rest of the process and shapes the experience around it, if newcomers know how to use it appropriately. There was one participant who had such a great onboarding experience with the previous company, which was smaller compared to the current one. In the previous company, the person had very good recruitment experience, which helped to well understand their potential colleagues and the future work. Materials were in place, “constantly reviewed and reflected”, which helped the person onboard very quickly and efficiently. Communication across the company was “crystal clear”, whenever there were any changes or updates. Being used to that standard, the person expected so much that it resulted in a hard hit with the current company. It made the organizational socialization experience much less excited than it was supposed to be. In their own words:

*“I guess, to be completely honest, I did not have this. I did not have the same excitement as before, and that was also expected from my side. Um, I understand various reasons why expectations did not meet the reality...”*

In sum, setting expectations for both the newcomers themselves and for their colleagues plays a very crucial role in having a successful socialization process.

### 4.1.2. Adaptation

Generally speaking, participants in the study used many tactics mentioned by Copper-Thomas et al (2011), under different words described during the interviews. Adaptation strategy in this study is reflected in three main areas: ‘be proactive’, ‘be open-minded and true to self’, and ‘ask for feedback and advice’.

‘Be proactive’ is a common tactic. It means being proactive in solving issues, taking action to make something work, or in asking questions and feedback. For example, one participant mentioned that when seeing there was so little documentation, they tried to document things themselves, including all questions and the answers they found, and where or who to find info or ask questions from. They also proposed some ways to make meetings more efficiently when witnessing how inefficiently the team conducted a meeting. The proposal included an agenda for the meeting and everyone should go to the meeting prepared. Another example is that a participant proposed with their team that they should have a survey sent to newcomers to understand what is good and what is missing in the current organizational socialization process. Later on, the team came up with plans to tackle the issues and implemented the solutions. The person also made a survey to assess the change, which the team did not have before. All these suggestions were appreciated by the team, making the newcomers feel recognized and appreciated. However, these suggestions in the early organizational socialization process are more likely to come from more experienced newcomers and from confidence they built through experience. One worthy note is that these experienced newcomers had many ideas already in the first weeks but priority has to be made. They made a plan of what can be done now and later on. This strategy seems to be in line with the ‘giving’ tactic mentioned by Copper-Thomas et al (2011).

*“I choose like many suggestions, come up with ideas and just like, off and running. Just like go and experiment and do stuff.”*

However, being proactive only proves its value if the pro-activeness was placed in appropriate tasks at an appropriate time. One of the participants mentioned that during the first month, when they saw so many things they would like to improve, including the ones not in their core job, they thought that priority was needed. They made a plan of when to do which. Otherwise, they may end up steering their work off track and other colleagues may question the intention and their performance.

One interesting finding tied with the ‘being proactive’ tactic is that several participants did not want to raise their voice or opinion when disagreeing with a certain way of onboarding or having concerns. They rather followed first and decided to speak up later when knowing everyone better. The reason is that they did not want others to interpret their intention differently, or even, wrongly, which is not beneficial for them as a new member in the team. For example:

*“I think if I say that I can figure it out on my own, then I'm afraid that there might be like two different reactions. One of them is like, ‘okay, sure’ and then they will let me do my thing. And the other one is like, ‘Oh, does she really know? ... maybe she has[does]...And[But] it's been years since she has used it. And...the platform already introduced new features that she might not be aware of.’”*

Those mentioning their hesitancy to speak up the disagreement ended up remaining silent at first. No one else from the participant group mentioned if they had disagreement with their colleagues during this process. From the interviews, there is no data suggesting which is better, remaining silent initially or speaking up right away when having disagreement. This can be a topic to examine more in-depth in future research.

A strategy that was also repeated throughout the interviews by newcomers is to ‘be open-minded and be true to self’ as much as possible. Several participants never worked in a start-up or a small company before, and did not know what to expect. They tried to stay open to anything and adapt to it. According to some interviewees, in the process of adaptation, sometimes it is difficult to be totally themselves. There are several reasons for this, including (1) trying to impress other colleagues and (2) unclear what should be done in the new environment. Below is the quote from one participant who observed the conflicting thoughts crossing their mind and tried to stay true to themselves.

*“it's hardest to be yourself in the beginning because you're trying to impress people. Right? And you're in this like unfamiliar place where you kind of want to shelter yourself, but at the same time, you would like them to get an impression of you. So if you start doing things or you say things that aren't actually true and then have to go back on it later, it's not very comfortable... It's just like be authentic from the beginning. Don't be*

*afraid, don't be shy because it will be more problematic later than in the beginning..."*

Another common tactic is that they frequently 'asked for feedback and advice' from their supervisors and colleagues. This strategy came up more from the newcomers in their early stage of career. They are more ready to learn by doing and not afraid of mistakes. They then asked for colleagues' comments or advice on specific situations. The experienced newcomers are more cautious. They preferred to figure things out themselves first. They wanted to prove that they came with experience and skills. When finding issues, one participant mentioned that he would have conversations with different people to see if they share concerns or questions, and together, find a solution. This is an interesting approach, which can be understood as finding the agreement even before bringing the concerns up. Regardless, these experienced newcomers still asked for feedback and advice as the new environment had so many uncertainties and new information that using their previous knowledge and skills were not enough to navigate.

One participant mentioned an interesting tactic of making efforts to continuously remind themselves of the good feeling throughout the whole process. To gain success in the socialization which lasts for a few months, the person tried to maintain the positive emotions they had at the beginning of the employment throughout the whole process.

*"Success is an effort over time. And the time aspect is just as crucial as the effort and, um, remembering and telling myself that and like, and like riding this wave of like, just very like solidness feeling, very contented and solid and like in a good place and not, not letting it ... burning[burn] that candle out too fast, you know, ... making it ...continue, continue. I guess that's my feeling."*

Success of socialization should be seen throughout the whole period, not only at a certain point in time. This notion also applies to the adaptation to the new environment and the tactics of this adaptation strategy - 'be proactive', 'be open-minded and true to self', and 'ask for feedback and advice'. Continuously practicing these tactics helps to turn them into one's own ways of working, which partly contribute to achieving a positive experience after the socialization process.

### 4.1.3. Work ownership

The strategy of ‘work ownership’ includes the three main tactics, namely ‘hands-on as soon as possible’, ‘do more than asked for’, and ‘own the work’. These tactics get repeated throughout all interviews. The first tactic is newcomers to try to ‘hands-on as soon as possible’, getting their hands “dirty” right from the first week or as soon as possible. Some newcomers said that they started doing tasks already from day two. They even tried to get to know the job even before the start date, from recruitment during interviews, visiting websites, materials online or asking supervisors about the materials to get to know the work better. Some participants mentioned that they read about the general knowledge of the work they were about to do. All of them had a good feeling when being able to do the real tasks already in the first week, productively contributing to their teams. One of the factors that made the hands-on work in the first week possible is the small size of their companies. In larger ones, learning about the organization, teams, products, and tools already takes time.

*Interviewee: “So you [I] got [a] real job from the second day.”*

*Interviewer: “How would you feel about it?”*

*Interviewee: “I like it that way. It's right in the middle of it. I think that's the best way to start.”*

Furthermore, given possibility and opportunity, several people agreed that it was good to ‘do more than being asked for’. The reasoning these participants used to justify the tactic is that the company is small and no one expects them to do just exactly what they are asked for in the job description. Hence, they took the opportunity and tried to prove themselves through the job that they were hired for and beyond. It is also a way to show their values to the company. However, similarly to the ‘be proactive’ tactic, this tactic only works if the work they want to do more during the socialization process is relevant to their core job. More importantly, their supervisor and colleagues should see it the same way too. Otherwise, it would be difficult for them to concentrate on their core job. One person shared that sometimes it is challenging to know exactly what tasks one needs to concentrate on, when there are a lot going on at the same time.

*“What should I concentrate on? Like what will be the best solution for me? So ... which ...to tackle first. And then, now that I think of it...two and a half months, I think I did still pretty okay. In retrospective, maybe I should have concentrated a bit more on the basics.”*

The next step is to 'own the work' that they were assigned to. Owning the work means managing and being responsible for it. The more experienced newcomers knew better how to own their work. The less experienced newcomers in this study had to rely on the more experienced colleagues to show them how to do certain tasks, or shadow the colleagues for a certain period of time until they can do it themselves. For newcomers, the information in the beginning might be too much to handle at once. Hence, they tried to piece things and information together as soon as possible to make sense of them and utilize in their own work. At the same time, the person confirmed with others their thoughts to reduce misunderstanding. This helps to save everyone's time. Another participant described their method for their own specific situation. Their job was not defined how it should look like, so they made a decision themselves and gave it a direction which they thought would be the best. In the person's own words:

*"...give it a direction where you'd want it to go."*

Work ownership, if possible to do early, is one of the best ways for newcomers to show the companies their values and earn respect and trust from other colleagues. It may take a longer time and effort for fresh graduates or less experienced newcomers than the experienced ones. However, it will be worth the effort to tackle the challenge and use this strategy as it significantly contributes to the success of the organizational socialization process.

#### 4.1.4. Relationship building

The majority of participants focused part of their time, both during and outside working hours, to build connection and relationship with their colleagues. There is one common tactic used to build connection: 'participating in informal events', such as team/ company lunch, weekly breakfast, weekly beer train, board game night, or any informal events that were organized. They said that it was great to connect with people through those occasions. Since there are often fewer than 40 people in the companies studied, it is not an issue to find a chance to talk to everyone in the company after several occasions. In those events, they tried to get to know others as much as possible. In addition, they said that their colleagues coming to those informal events opened up more about their personal lives, instead of just talking about work.

*"Network, talk to people. Learn from people and what's happening. It is easier to integrate"*



An interesting tactic that two people mentioned, is that they tried to ‘learn everyone’s names’ through the organization chart. It helped them to feel closer to people, and the colleagues felt good knowing that they made an effort. To newcomers, remembering names of their new colleagues is a challenging task, especially for the ones that are not often good with names. The companies in this research also have people speaking different languages, making learning the names difficult. With people who have already worked in the companies, they need to learn normally one new person’s name at a time. With newcomers, they need to learn dozens of names at a time. Hence, having some method to remember the names would help greatly.

*“One thing I did was look on the team page of the company a lot to learn names because I just really wanted to know people's names and, so I studied that a lot.”*

Another tactic that one participant used was to ‘treat colleagues as more than colleagues’. The person tried to share about their personal life, not just stories about work. They did not expect others to do the same, but they did it anyway because they felt comfortable enough to open up. From those personal stories, it was easy for the participant to find connection with other colleagues. It significantly helped this participant to blend in.

*“I try to treat my team members as like just regular people instead of like colleagues, of course they are colleagues and you need to keep that in mind...I share a lot of my personal life of course, to some certain extent... so that they know more about me and then gradually we can share a lot of things together. So that's really good. It's the same way as I have been doing, I don't expect it from the others. They don't have to share a bit, but I kinda like it. I try to be an open book.”*

However, this strategy depends greatly on the newcomer’s personality. For some people, it is not simple to share about their personal lives with the ones they do not yet have a good connection with. In addition, how a person shares their personal stories might be perceived by others differently from original intention. For instance, if any colleague feels that the newcomer talks too much about their personal life, they may feel awkward or pressured to share theirs while they do not want to do it yet. Therefore, newcomers should be careful when using this tactic.

#### 4.1.5. Newcomers' development areas

Besides above tactics which helped newcomers in their socialization process, there are areas that some newcomers thought they could have done better to make the experience more successful. One worthy note is that not all participants thought that there is a development area. One of them said:

*“I don't know if there is much I could have done differently.”*

There were two people mentioning that they could have ‘organized their time or schedule better’. Since there were too many things they needed and wanted to do during the first few weeks, it was challenging to sort out which one they should do first. They wished that along the process, they would have spent time to re-organize priorities and reflect. One person said:

*“The second thing that I can think of is how to organize my time better and to be really clear about what I wanted to do, um, when I first joined.”*

The same participant also mentioned that they should have ‘made their responsibilities clearer to others’. In this particular case, the person had two responsibilities, one was the core job and the second was outside of the core. The second responsibility was allowed to take a very minor portion of the working time. The person's team members were not well aware of the second responsibility, hence their expectations towards the newcomer was not set correctly. They thought that the newcomer should have spent more time on the team's tasks. In the person's own words:

*“So I did not communicate clearly, uh, my second responsibility, which is about organizational health and structure to my team. And it happened for a reason actually. I just didn't think of it. So they were some occasions, where, um, I got a feeling though it was never made clear that maybe people expected me to be more involved in some certain periods.”*

In retrospective, two people said that they wished they ‘asked more’ right away when having concerns or needing more information. It would help to clear misunderstanding or provide information that they were looking for right at the time they need it the most. However, it is understandable why newcomers did not ask for it at the beginning. New company often means a new uncertain environment. They were not sure what they should do and should

not. The plan of the organizational socialization process not being communicated clearly also made it difficult. They may not know if it is appropriate to ask more than what was provided, and decided not to. They may think that the information they would like to know will come anyway soon, hence decided not to raise the question.

*“I should have asked my supervisor to give me more info, introduction where I found missing.”*

*“I should have asked those questions right away, not necessarily [to wait for] the right people but from the ones I know first.”*

In sum, there are three noteworthy areas that newcomers thought they could improve on, namely (1) ‘organize their time or schedule better’, (2) ‘make their responsibilities clearer to others’, and (3) ‘ask more’.

#### **4.2. Company’s tactics under newcomers’ perspectives**

From newcomers’ points of view, their companies also used tactics to facilitate the organizational socialization process and try to make it successful. Those tactics are categorized into four main areas: (1) ‘provide basic info’, (2) ‘quick hands-on work’, (3) ‘trust and autonomy’, and (4) ‘emotional support and networking’. The table below summarizes the strategies that each company of newcomers in the study used according to them.

*Table 8: Summary of companies and their tactics*

No.	Company’s product	Founded	No. of people	Company’s strategies used
1	AI- and IoT-based energy optimization software	2016	40	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy
2	Mobile game, Game research	2015	20	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy
3	Trade and investment service	2006	26	Provide basic info, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking
4	Marketplace platform	2011	20	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking

No.	Company's product	Founded	No. of people	Company's strategies used
5	Community-driven activities to promote diversity of talents in start-up life	2016	11	Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking
6	Coaching, Training, Corporate values, Leadership	1997	20	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking
7	Console game	2018	20	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking
8	Space and service provider for start-ups	2016	13	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking
9	Recruiting, Interviewing, SaaS	2010	28	Provide basic info, Quick hands-on work, Trust and autonomy, Emotional support and networking

#### 4.2.1. Provide basic information

From the data, it is seen that the majority of participants went through a similar process regarding practicality and getting basic information about their companies. The company-side strategies found in the data are in line with previous research.

There are three main ways to provide basic information: 'through recruitment process', 'induction' to newcomers during the first week, and 'training'. The majority of participants said that they got a good amount of information about the company and the job through the job ad and interviews. Then, during the first week, there was an introduction about the company, the office, and human resources (HR) information. Depending on the company, this information was given by the CEO, Office Manager, HR Manager, Assistant, or newcomers' supervisors. The supervisor was often the one showing the newcomers around, introducing them to colleagues, and providing necessary equipment, access, and employment benefits, i.e. healthcare plan, compensation package, and other company-specific benefits. There was only one person that mentioned training in their socialization process, which seems to stand out. That specific company is state-funded and found it

necessary to provide basic training to all newcomers. The training was about using software programs that are needed for the job.

Regarding the content of the basic information, in most cases, it was about the company history, current state, and the product. However, the majority reported that the production introduction was very brief. Some participants said that they had an introduction to the company's product in detail, which was greatly helpful. They were able to understand the holistic picture and figure out how their work could make an impact on the product. Many other participants knew more about their company's product(s) only towards the latter half of the socialization process. They wished that the info would have been introduced to them much earlier. These newcomers had to find the information themselves from multiple sources in the company. However, each source did not have a full picture of the product, hence it took the newcomers time to connect these pieces together.

*“They gave me a demo of our product, just like a demo that they give to the customers. And, um, told me about all the features in the platform it has. So ...that was nice. And, um, I did get a lot of information through that.”*

However, one newcomer said that there was no proper company introduction given. The context is that the newcomer took part in a training that the company held publicly, then became an employee. The person's supervisor thought that during the training, the company's introduction was provided, hence there was no need to do it again. In the newcomer's point of view, the company's introduction given in an external training was very general. As an employee, the person should have known more widely and deeply about the company in order to do their job better.

Regarding the delivery of information, two participants reported that there was a “newcomer presentation” including general practical information on the company. The rest said that it was “just talking”. This means only two out of nine companies had this overall introduction properly documented to a certain extent. This is understandable for a small company with very few newcomers each year. Assigning someone to document and update it once there is a newcomer seems not to be a priority. However, with newcomers, if they can find the introduction in written material, it will be easy to review later on. There is a lot of information to process at the beginning and it is easy to forget the things that are not directly

relevant to their daily work. Only two participants praised their organizational socialization process for being organized thoroughly and for good documentation.

*“One thing that was really impressive and it continues to impress me is that they had really documented things very well. So, um, whether it's for my role specifically, there's this like support operations guide and it has like, if a customer wants to do this, you do this, you know, or she wants to do this, we did[do] that. It's like super helpful.”*

#### 4.2.2. Quick hands-on work

The next tactic that companies in the study used to get their newcomers onboard is quickly giving them hands-on work. There were several ways to facilitate this process.

‘Through recruitment’ is the first and foremost step. All reported that through the interview process, they got a good idea of how their work was at a higher level. Some said that through the task given during the recruitment, they understood the job better and at a deeper level. Then, once newcomers join, the following methods are utilized: ‘give tasks early’, ‘provide shadowing for junior newcomers’, and ‘weekly company and team meetings’.

When all newcomers started working, they were ‘given tasks early’. Their companies provided them some hands-on tasks already in the first week, even on day two in some cases. Participants said that this is the best way for them to understand the work quickly and generate positive emotions. This strategy was seen with more experienced newcomers since their supervisor knew that the newcomers might not need extensive instruction to get started. It may not work well with less experienced ones, especially with the freshly graduated newcomers, when they are not really sure about what is required to complete their main jobs.

For less experienced newcomers, their companies often ‘provided shadowing opportunities’. This means someone with more experience to show them how to do certain tasks, follow-up and give comments and feedback. This tactic is seen in previous research and proven to be effective in this circumstance. The less experienced newcomers felt more reassured that they knew how to do the task properly according to the company’s practice. They also had chances to observe the ways of working of the more experienced colleagues. If companies did not provide this shadowing, the newcomers said that it would take them much more time to get onboard.

Many also said that through ‘weekly company and team meetings’ they learned about what happened and what was planned for the upcoming project or work. They also learned more about the company’s product(s) which helped to understand how their work made an impact on the product(s). Some participants reported that they had daily “stand-ups” where team members would update on what they did the day before and would do that day. This seems to tie to specific industries and lines of work, e.g. software development. Altogether, these weekly meetings and daily stand-ups were an effective way for newcomers to learn quickly about their own work.

One exceptional case worth mentioning is that a participant in a lead role did not have anyone to hand-over or transition the work, and the person had to figure out everything by themselves. It delayed the possibility to do hands-on work early. Even though the participant had extensive working experience before joining the current company, familiarizing oneself with the new work in a new environment is a challenging task when there was no one providing introduction.

#### 4.2.3. Trust and autonomy

The majority of newcomers reported that they were ‘given autonomy and trust’ after a short period, which is very much appreciated. They said it encouraged them significantly. This pattern was seen with both experienced newcomers and less experienced ones. Newcomers had a chance to do hands-on work right from the first week, proving their skills to their supervisors in the early stage of the socialization process. Because their teams were small, other colleagues easily saw their performance and contribution, naturally started to trust that they know how to do their job well. One person said:

*“I feel like I have a fair amount of trust for my colleagues and a reasonable amount of autonomy to be able to make the right decisions and guide my own work.”*

Another factor to earn trust early is the supervisor and colleagues constantly ‘giving feedback’ to the newcomers, especially to the less experienced ones. Knowing what was done well, how newcomer’s performance was perceived by others helped them adjust their delivery and ways of working in the new environment. The positive feedback also helps to boost newcomers’ motivation and satisfaction towards their jobs. If the feedback is

constructive and others see that newcomers act upon it, it is more likely and quickly for colleagues to trust the newcomers.

*“They would give their comments and feedback and ideas, which was very helpful, all that was very nice.”*

For some newcomers, the feedback session after the first month, or in monthly cadence was very helpful. This is an important tactic that companies should pay attention to. If no one tells the newcomers how good or bad their work is, it will be much more challenging for them to self-assess.

Additionally, two people out of nine reported that after a month or so, they had a “check-in” about the onboarding. Below quotation is from a newcomer who had early and frequent “check-ins”.

*“...how, like effective this onboarding process has been, has been after one month, there has already been ... a progress discussion and a feedback opportunity. And like, this is what you're doing. Well, this is what needs improving, you know, how do you feel, what do you think what's your experience been? ... wow, that's awesome. One month, one month in, you know, that's crazy. So I'm feeling very, very good.”*

The check-in does not take a lot of time from the newcomer’s supervisor but could help the newcomer tremendously. The ones who did not receive this all wished they had this check-in to know the performance and whether they need to change or improve anything, in addition to the areas where they are doing well.

#### 4.2.4. Emotional support and network

All participants mentioned that they received great support from their supervisors and colleagues. There are three main ways to implement this tactic of emotional support and network: ‘be present to newcomers’, ‘meet everyone at work and beyond’, and ‘organize informal events’.

Since the company is small and the supervisor or the team lead was sitting next to them, it was easy to reach out, ask questions or bounce ideas. ‘Be present for newcomers’ shows in providing opportunities for interaction and support. Their colleagues were also always willing to help and give comments on the work if asked for. Newcomers felt that they were



cared for, and are encouraged to ask questions at any time. One person shared the feeling towards the supervisor.

*“The person that's in charge of me, he really has done a good job of making me feel... cared for and ...but isn't ...too much, you know. He likes to explain things ...he's ...a chatting person and that's totally fine.”*

Another strategy that was seen in the majority of companies in the study is that they organized for newcomers to ‘meet everyone at work and beyond’ at the beginning of the socialization process. It was mainly through one on one meetings where newcomers learned about their colleagues’ work and background, about how they can support each other, and set expectations for both sides. Newcomers reported that these one on one meetings were very helpful to not only do their job better but also build connection quickly. One participant said:

*“So in order to make sure that we know everybody that we might be working with or there is a possibility of working with, so there were one to one meetings with all of the people in the organization [which] is not really big. So there have 25 people...So that was really nice because we could speak in a proper note of what's going on and I'll speak in kind of like an open lab. So that was a really nice thing.”*

The last common strategy is to ‘organize informal events’ during and outside work hours, and encourage newcomers to join. Those events were lunches, team or company breakfasts, beer trains. Some companies also arranged activities that required personal time from participants, such as board game night, picnic, wall climbing. It is interesting to see that employees in those companies were willing to spend their personal time and effort. This played an important role in supporting newcomers to socialize better. This is the difference between small companies and their larger counterparts. It is easier to have a high participation rate in these informal events in the small companies than the larger ones. In those events, newcomers reported that people usually talked about work first, and then topics shifted to life, family, or travel. One participant shared their surprise with the outcome of this tactic and great feeling of belongingness to their company.

*“I was struck by the amount of effort and time that goes into doing team stuff. Um, in terms of ... team events and, uh, ...people enjoying to spend*

*[spending] time together. Like my first day in the office, I remember I was kind of lingering behind ... as a long day. And, uh, it was ...a guy just ...playing the guitar, you know, ...in one of the chairs and ...just like killing time in the office, but ...clearly enjoying that space, ... It wasn't like 'I'm done with work'.*”

*“One of the things that was odd by that I told you about was, um, the emphasis on team stuff. And people's willingness to go and have a board game night on Thursday for hours and spend that time together or, um, you know, just like have a party on Saturday at the office, things like that. And I was ...like, wow...It's ...the sense of awe which has continued to help people to feel really close and communicate really well.”*

These networking events surely helped them to integrate into their teams and understand their colleagues better.

#### 4.2.5. Company development areas under newcomers' perspective

According to the participants, there are five main areas that their companies could improve to facilitate better the organizational socialization experience: (1) have a simple process and structure for onboarding, (2) provide an introduction to company's product(s), (3) have proper documentation, (4) communicate the expectation in detailed level and made it as clear and early as possible, and (5) have frequent check-in and feedback sessions.

The first one is to 'have a simple process and structure'. The process should allow parties involved to tailor the socialization according to people's working and learning styles. Out of nine participants, only two said that their organizational socialization process was carefully thought and well organized. The rest wished that there would be some structure to it. The way the organizational socialization process these newcomers went through required them to navigate the information and do the work that is supposed to be done by the company side. It reduces their time to spend on the actual work. It is also good to have someone who has the overall picture of all teams and practicalities so that newcomers can reach out for support. It would be best to have someone in charge of the organizational socialization process for all newcomers. In addition, some participants mentioned how onboarding did not take into account the difference of working and learning styles. They understood why

their supervisors did it, but thought that they both could have saved a lot of time if it was tailored a little bit more.

*“How fast do I learn or how slow do I learn? So, or if I had experienced using a system like this, which I have. So to me that was easy, not a particular one that we are using, but I have experienced ...with similar [system] in that sense. I think I felt like there wasn't that much of hand holding needed, but I can see why... they wanted to have it.”*

The second one is to ‘provide an introduction about the company's product(s)’ as soon as possible. As mentioned above, the newcomers that received this introduction found it greatly helpful. The ones who did not early in the process wished if they had known about their product and features early enough, it would have reduced the questions they asked along the way and helped them to align their work better.

*“Our CEO and ...sales team lead that they would, um, explain [to] me ... about the principal, like the financial situation, the company right now, where they're going, um, what kind of... companies, they might be targeting since I'm working in marketing. That's only information that I'm interested in. And also they gave me a demo of our product, just like a demo that they give to the customers. And, um, told me about all the features ...So ... that was nice. And, um, I did get a lot of information through that.”*

The third suggestion goes to ‘documentation’. This feedback was mentioned repeatedly by many participants. For the process to be productive, basic information should be documented clearly where that is easy to find. It is about the company and employment, e.g. tax, salary, vacation policy. The documentation also can be about a short guideline of how the organizational socialization process is organized, including basic steps that any newcomers need to go through. One participant said that since there was no documentation, they made their own one by collecting the information provided verbally or from some presentations. One participant made a point that if there is no documentation, what would happen if someone suddenly got sick or left the company. In their own word, the person said:

*“These things should be written down, not just keeping here.”* [pointing to the head]

The fourth development area is to ‘communicate the expectation in detail as early and as clearly as possible’. Newcomers thought that they should know how to succeed in their roles, and how to achieve that success according to their perspective and their company’s. This conversation should be initiated from the company side, in this case, the newcomer's supervisor or team lead. Asking for this expectation themselves is not easy. There are two reasons: (1) they may not know what is coming next so they decided to wait, and (2) uncertainty of the new environment makes them hesitant to bring it up. According to one participant, this conversation happened from the early phase and it helped them shape expectation and organize their work well.

*“Now I have a very clear understanding of what my role is, what success in my role looks like, um, and how to achieve that success. Like ...how to do it. You know, there's still autonomy in terms of like, you're not micromanaged and said, give this up to this step, to this step [explaining how to resolve a ticket]. But it's like, this is what a good job looks like.”*

By contrast, one person described how difficult it was for them to guess the detailed expectation when there was no communication about the expectation from the company or supervisor. There was no concrete measurement of their work. Lacking this detail could make newcomers stressful when they tried to guess the expectation of the people that they did not know well.

*“It's very difficult to put things into measurements. It's difficult to put things into, um, an objective perspective because simply ... [it] doesn't make sense, right? We don't have measurements, we don't have criteria and there's too much speculation toward each other's work from the company toward a team and from a team to a person, not to mention personal expectations.”*

The last suggestion is to have a ‘frequent check-in and feedback session’. This would help newcomers to see their own performance under others’ perspective as early as possible. Issues also can be spotted at the right time and addressed accordingly. According to the newcomers, check-in could be in weekly or monthly cadence, but feedback should be in time and ongoing. It would help them reflect more precisely and improve their work promptly.

### 4.3. Observations during interviews

When telling their stories, participants often provided facts – what happened – and their thoughts and feelings. They were compared with previous experience, or other colleague’s socialization experience which happened in the same period. It is interesting to observe the flow of thoughts on how their current experience is affected by past experiences that shaped the expectation. Sometimes, the interview questions triggered parts of the socialization process that they did not think about before. On the spot, they reflected and reaffirmed while answering the questions.

There was one interview where the participant seemed emotionally negative about their onboarding but did not say it explicitly. The person was not open to answer the questions thoroughly and comfortably. This assumption was based on their expression when recalling the process. Answers were kept short and neutral. The person did not mention positive or negative feelings. However, there was one time when being asked “how does your feeling about the company and the job change over time?”, the person answered:

*“I guess everything has its honeymoon period. And eventually you begin to learn more about the flaws in your coworkers and the company, but overall I’m still happy.”*

It was interesting to observe how they reacted to the same questions differently. An outstanding difference is when they were asked about their own development areas. One person said that there was none that needed to be improved. Only one person was critical about their participation in the process and reflected thoroughly. The rest brought up one or two areas. However, when asked about development areas that their companies should improve on, there were a lot of suggestions. This could be seen in the two sections above, with five main areas for companies and only three areas for newcomers.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There has not been much discussion around the topic of the organizational socialization process in small companies, especially in Finland. This study focuses on exploring the organizational socialization process in small companies in Finland through one of their newcomers' perspectives, to figure out which tactics from the company's or newcomer's perspective are being used and which are not, and to what effects. The strategies both newcomers used in their cases and the company's strategies under the newcomer's perspective were analysed, discussed, and compared with the general tactics. With nine participants chosen from nine different companies in several industries and semi-structured interviews, data collected was analysed based on the grounded theory methodology. From there, patterns and variations were identified and grouped into themes.

Main findings are categorized into three groups: (1) newcomers' tactics, and (2) what newcomers saw as company's tactics through their own experience. The main newcomers' tactics are demonstrated as 'expectation setting', 'adaptation', 'work ownership', and 'relationship building'. The participants also shared the areas they thought could be improved to make the socialization process more successful, namely (1) organize their time or schedule better, (2) make their responsibilities clearer to others, and (3) ask more. The main company's tactics are reflected through 'providing basic info', 'quick hands-on work', 'trust and autonomy', and 'emotional support and networking'. The participants also shared what they thought their companies could have done better, including (1) have a simple process and structure for onboarding, (2) provide an introduction about company's product(s), (3) have proper documentation, (4) communicate the expectation in detailed level and make it as clear and early as possible, and (5) have frequent check-in and feedback sessions.

The following section will discuss the implications for complementing prior literature and practical insights, as well as this study's limitation, then finally some suggestions for further research.

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

#### 5.1.1. Theoretical Implications About Newcomer's Tactics

For newcomers, most of the tactics found in this study were mentioned in previous research. 'Being proactive', 'asking for feedback and information' are similar to *observational* tactic.

'Work ownership' belongs to the *self-determined* strategy. All the tactics in relationship building category were seen in *mutual development* tactic (Copper-Thomas et al., 2011). The data found in this study confirmed the previous research on newcomer's strategies and extend it on the *self-determined*, in the context of small companies. To the interviewees, 'doing more than being asked for' was beneficial for them, helping them to *prove* themselves (Copper-Thomas et al., 2011).

Nonetheless, one tactic used by the participants in this study was interesting and worth to consider in organizational socialization process: expectation setting. It is not just to set others' expectation about the newcomers, which was mentioned in the tactic *negotiating* ((Copper-Thomas et al., 2011). It is also setting expectation for themselves about the socialization process before it begins and along the way.

There are tactics that are more likely to be used by experienced newcomers in this study: setting expectations for others and owning the work. However, they were less likely to use the tactic 'ask for feedback and advice'. They tried to prove themselves with his skills and experience and for them, asking for advice proved otherwise. They often had more ideas to develop the team's work or were bolder to implement the ideas. In these small companies, the participants likely had more chance do hands-on work early. In larger companies, it takes longer time to onboard, including learning about the company and product as well as their own work.

### 5.1.2. Theoretical Implications About Company's Tactics

Regarding company's tactics, majority of them were mentioned in the process suggested by Hendricks & Louw-Potgieter (2012). *Content* reflected in the study's data through provide basic info in induction, trainings, and documentation. *Support* shows in giving feedback, shadow for junior newcomers, emotional support and networking. Only two out of nine interviewees from these small companies mentioned *follow-up*, in the form of feedback discussion or check-in after a month.

From the interview data, the socialization process in these small companies was mostly *informal*. Companies in this study lacked of documentation which was often found in larger companies and previous literature about the process. Small companies also gave hands-on work more early than their larger counterpart. The reasons may be: there was less information to learn about the company and they had less resources so that when a newcomer joins, they wanted them to get hands-on as soon as possible.

Giving trust and autonomy and quick hands-on work are two novel findings. In the small company's context, time is of the essence and newcomers were required to get on board quickly. Simultaneously, this requirement brought joy to newcomers as they had an earlier chance to prove their values and contribute to the work. It goes in hand with giving trust and autonomy, once the supervisors saw the value and contribution.

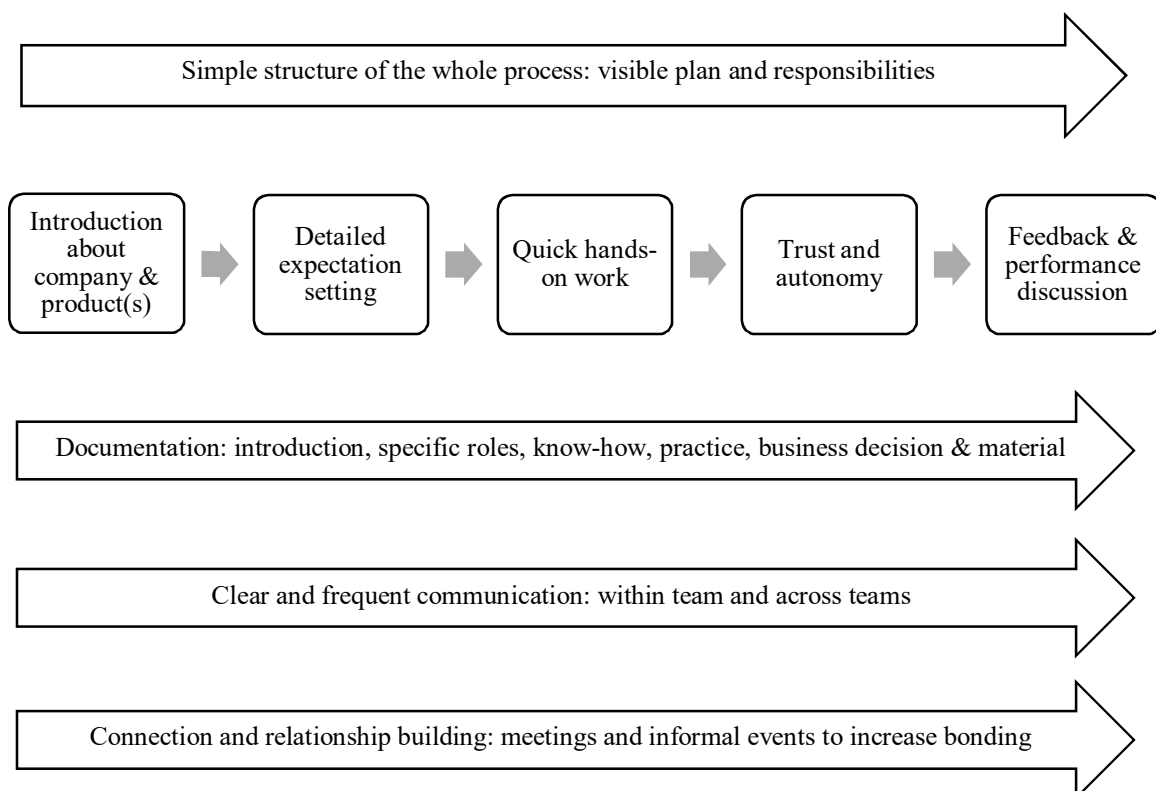
## 5.2. Practical Implications

This section will discuss how an organizational socialization process in small companies can be organized based on good practices in participants' companies and the suggestions they mentioned in the interviews.

### 5.2.1. Successful organizational socialization process in small companies

There are several main factors to make the organizational socialization process in small companies successful, including: simple structure of process, proper introduction about company and product(s), good documentation, expectation setting, quick hands-on work, trust and autonomy, clear and frequent communication, feedback and performance discussion. The graph below describes these elements in more details.

*Graph 2: A design of a successful organization socialization process in small companies*





First of all, the process needs to have a structure, even a simple one will be better than no structure. This means there are certain steps that newcomers know they are going through during the next few months. This plan should be communicated to them via a written format, where they can refer back to if needed. A good plan also states (1) the people involved in the socialization process and their responsibilities, (2) where to find information or who to ask from, (3) activities requiring participation and activities made voluntary, and (4) stages of the process and expected outcomes of each stage.

The steps in this suggestion were designed based on the previous studies, good practices from the participants' companies and their suggestions. The companies in the study followed this design at a higher level, but did not focus on the details which are seemingly granular yet essential factors. In general, the process includes an introduction to the company and its product(s). Then detailed expectation setting is conducted, with what is expected of newcomers and what newcomers should expect from the company and colleagues. The more detailed it is, the better. This expectation should be in writing so that both newcomers and supervisors have a material to refer back to when discussing feedback and performance. The third step is to provide quick hands-on work. How quick it can be depends on the newcomer's working experience related to the role. Junior newcomers may need more active support and detailed instruction at first. However, the actual tasks already given helps to create a feeling of early achievement. Once seeing the good delivery and contribution, companies should show to newcomers that they are trusted and given autonomy. This means there is not too much micromanagement on the day-to-day work and newcomers can make decisions, from small to bigger ones over time. The last step would be formal discussion about feedback and performance. However, feedback should be given frequently.

Secondly, there are three things that should be implemented throughout the whole process, namely documentation, communication, and relationship building. Documentation includes generic materials for all newcomers and specific documents for each role. All materials should be updated frequently. The materials used to prepare a newcomer's arrival may consist of information about the company and product(s), introduction about teams, basics of HR practices and benefits. It would be helpful if there are answers and instructions for frequently asked questions and who to go to for certain information. The materials are ideally written in some place that can be easily accessed by anyone in the company.

The communication piece can be broken down to three levels: within the newcomer's team and across teams. The content could be about the company's goal, team's goal, plans to execute these goals. Communication is also about current events. This will help everyone to reflect on their own work and contribution. The cadence of communication depends on the level of communication. Within newcomers' teams, communication should happen weekly or daily. Across-team communication may happen in a longer cadence, e.g. bi-weekly or monthly. Communication with the whole company could be weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, depending on the topics.

Newcomers also need to know their performance and feedback from other colleagues. This information can help to ensure delivery and aligns with business objectives. Feedback discussions should be frequent, e.g. daily, weekly, monthly. The discussions can be kept light yet fruitful. Supervisors should know how to give and receive feedback too, in order to work with each other effectively. In addition, companies should provide opportunities for newcomers to ask for feedback and advice. As mentioned in the Findings section, the experienced newcomers are more hesitant in asking for advice as they prefer to figure things out themselves first. They wanted to prove their experience and competency. Hence, knowing the mindset of newcomers also helps their supervisors or their team to facilitate the feedback or check-in sessions effectively.

Looking at a company as a community, connection and relationship among employees need to be fostered to create bonding. Relationship building activities that companies can organize include two main types: formal meetings and informal events. The formal meetings could be one on one meetings or team meetings. At the same time, some informal events are beneficial for newcomers and other employees to get to know each other better, e.g. team lunch, beer train, board game night. Sometimes, companies just need to encourage employees to organize informal events themselves, based on their hobbies for instance.

In summary, a simple structure of the socialization process with proper documentation, clear communication, and relationship building encouragement can be an effective design to achieve a successful outcome.

### **5.3. Limitation of the study**

This study also has its own limitations. The sample of nine participants from nine companies is relatively small. Among those companies, there are several industries. Hence each industry

has only a handful of representatives. With this sample size, the generalization from the data needs more verification to be proven trustworthy.

Sometimes the memory about the socialization process was not vivid or clear. For example, at some point in any interview, the participants said “probably we had” or “I can’t remember what the exact tasks were about”. This affects the trustworthiness of their stories, in which how much is fact and how much is their own perception and imagination.

In the majority of cases, they said that their socialization process was short and required them to proactively learn and seek information about the company afterwards. They also did their work quite independently with very limited supervision, even in the case of junior newcomers. Hence, the requirement of working under six months prior to interview time may be even too long since some of them already completed their socialization far before that. This is different from larger companies where the socialization process often lasts longer due to the larger amount of knowledge and induction needed for the work.

#### **5.4. Suggestions for further research**

For further research, the newcomers’ experience in small companies should be studied as soon as possible. Based on some samples in this study, the interview time happening two to three months after their start date seems to be the most effective for participants to recall their experience correctly.

The second suggestion is to go deeper into a particular industry to understand thoroughly how socialization processes are conducted in small companies. This could help to identify better patterns and variations, hence suggestions for good practice will be more relevant.

Thirdly, an interesting topic could be a socialization process for immigrants in a company having English as the official working language but the majority of employees speak the local language. Language difference emerged indirectly once in this study and was intentionally left out of scope in this study. In that case, the participant reported that even though English is the official working language, a majority of employees in the participant’s company are local and they prefer speaking Finnish. This makes perfect sense. However, it limits the newcomers’ opportunity to be exposed to informal conversation. The participant referred to their colleague who was not speaking Finnish at that time and joined before the person did. Nonetheless, the colleague seemed not to know about the company as well as the interviewee.

*“I think he joined a month or two before me, but I knew more about the company than he did or after like my first month...They don't even know if that's relevant to them... And somehow you cannot decide if it's relevant or not to them...they [Finnish colleagues] have their own like bubble their own friendship. They have their own inside jokes. ...I don't think that speaking Finnish is necessary to move here, but I know that it makes your life easier.”*

The last suggestion is whether at the beginning of the employment newcomers should raise their voice or remain silent when having disagreement with their supervisors or teammates. This topic was mentioned above in the Findings section. Choosing between speaking up and remaining silence depends on many factors. The newcomer's action on this matter may make an impact not only on the socialization process but also the company's business. Hence, this would be an interesting topic for future research.

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# APPENDICES

## Interview questions

**Topic:** Onboarding process in small firms in Finland. (explain onboarding if needed).

The interview is confidential, and information is kept anonymous. Your name and your company's name will NOT appear in my thesis. It would be great if I can record the interview for the analysis, with your permission. The record will be deleted after transcription.

**Purpose:** I'm very interested in the experience with onboarding process when someone first joined a small-size company (10-50 people). How they come to learn about the company, colleagues, and the work.

### Question list:

1. First, could you tell me about the type of work you do in ... (company's name)?
  - a. How long have you been here?
2. Now can you go back to your early days of joining the company and tell me about your experience of starting out.

Follow-up if not covered:

3. What were your expectations, feelings, and thoughts before joining the company?
  - *Follow-up: how did you feel after being selected for the job and before working there? Do you know anybody before joining?*
  - *Example to elaborate.*
4. What did you expect about the first few days?
5. What did you do during the first few days?
  - *(for me to follow-up) What did your feel?*
6. How was initial experience different from your expectations?
7. What did the company expect from you during the first few months?
  - How were the expectations communicated?
  - Example to elaborate
8. How did the company help you familiarize with aspects related to your job?
  - *(for me to follow-up) any compulsory activity / how long / what did you learn or adjust from those activities / what do you feel about those / anything to improve?*
  - *Example to elaborate*



- Did the onboarding/socialization/induction program help you to reduce any anxiety and uncertainty?
9. How did the company help you familiarize with company's /team's culture?
    - How did you feel about these ways of familiarization / induction?
  10. What did you do to familiarize yourself in that new environment?
    - *(for me to follow-up) What strategies have you used to help you adjust, find out information, and make sense of things?*
  11. How is the onboarding in this company different from your previous experience?
  12. How do you feel about your first days at the company in general? (smooth/frustrated/something in between?)
    - Have these feelings changed over time?
  13. If you flash back when you just started and could have come back to that time, what would you do something differently so that your start would have been better or smoother?
  14. How does the onboarding influence your decision to continue working at the company?
  15. Is there anything else you wanna share about the onboarding?

Finally, here some more technical questions on company as a whole... or technical questions on the persons career background

1. Is this your first job?
2. What is your role in your company? Do you know your company size? Age?