



**The Role of Socialization Tactics and Information Seeking  
in Newcomers' Psychological Contracts**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study integrates research on socialization and psychological contracts by examining the role of socialization tactics and information seeking in how newcomers evaluate their psychological contract. Using a three wave longitudinal study of newcomers, this study examines the antecedents of newcomers' information seeking behavior and psychological contract fulfillment. The findings suggest that socialization tactics are positively related to newcomers' information seeking behaviors towards supervisor and colleagues. Proactive personality was also positively related to information seeking behaviors but no support was found for the effect of general self-efficacy. Information seeking behavior toward supervisor was positively related to newcomers' perceived employer fulfillment of obligations while information seeking behavior toward colleagues was positively related to newcomers' fulfillment of obligations to the employer. Socialization tactics was also found to positively effect perceived fulfillment of both employee and employer obligations. The findings and implications for the management of newcomers' psychological contracts are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychological contract fulfillment; Socialization, Information seeking; Socialization tactics

## **The Role of Socialization Tactics and Information Seeking in Newcomers' Psychological Contracts**

At the heart of the employee-organization relationship is the psychological contract, reflecting an unwritten agreement about the reciprocal elements of exchanges existing between an individual employee and the employing organization (Rousseau, 1995). Rousseau defines the psychological contract as “individual beliefs shaped by the organization, regarding the terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organizations” (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9). A prominent strand of empirical research has focused on examining the consequences of contract breach whereby the employee perceives that his/her employer has failed to fulfill one or more obligations. As such, the evidence strongly supports the underlying norm of reciprocity whereby employees reciprocate their employer contingent upon their perception of how well the employer has fulfilled its obligations to them. Perceived contract breach is associated with lower employee obligations to the employer, trust, affective commitment, in-role and extra-role performance (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003).

Less emphasis has been placed on the formation of the psychological contract and on the development of contract breach despite calls for additional research (De Vos, Buyens, & Schalk, 2003; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 2001). Furthermore, there is little empirical work on newcomers' psychological contracts and how this exchange relationship develops in the early stages. When newcomers enter the organization, they possess an anticipatory psychological contract that is a naïve schema about the reciprocal exchange relationship with their employer (Anderson & Thomas, 1996). During the socialization period, newcomers have to make sense of their new environment (Louis, 1980; Weick, 1995) and this sense making process is seen as critical to the development of attitudes and behaviors

that enable newcomers to function effectively within their new work environment (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). It also plays an important role in the adjustment of the newcomer to the organization (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a). Integral to this process is newcomers' sense making regarding their psychological contract that is modified based on interpretations of their initial organizational experiences which gives rise to a more elaborate, complete and fully formed psychological contracts.

This study attempts to extend understanding of newcomers' psychological contracts by integrating research on socialization thereby providing a more comprehensive basis to understanding the exchange relationship newcomers develop with their employing organization. Specifically, we begin by examining the role of socialization tactics and newcomer dispositional factors on information seeking behavior. We then examine the predictive effects of socialization tactics and information seeking behaviors on how newcomers evaluate their psychological contract. Consistent with the focus of the psychological contract in capturing the exchange between the employee and organization, we focus on the terms of the exchange – the extent to which employees perceive that they are fulfilling their obligations to the employer and the extent to which they perceive their employer as fulfilling its obligations to them. We counterbalance the emphasis given to employer behavior in previous empirical studies by considering the role of newcomer proactivity (i.e. information seeking behaviors) in the evaluation of the psychological contract.

## **THEORY**

### **The Psychological Contract as a Mental Model of the Employment Relationship**

Rousseau (2001) proposed a cognitive basis for the psychological contract that is grounded in the concept of schema. A schema is a mental model of conceptually related

elements that gradually develops from experience and guides the way novel information is organized (Stein, 1992). Schemas typically affect the perception of incoming information, the retrieval of stored information, and inferences based on that information, thereby simplifying the process by which people make sense of events and situations (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Individuals hold schemas regarding the employment relationship – guiding beliefs about the nature of a typical employment relationship and this influences how an individual interprets the cues and signals from the organization (Rousseau, 1995, 2001; Shore & Tetrick, 1994) and also guides his/her interpretation and recollection of promises that exist within any specific employment relationship (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Organizational influences seem to play an important role in shaping an individual's psychological contract during the socialization period. Rousseau (2001) argues that on the job socialization is an important influence on an individual's psychological contract and others have suggested that socialization may affect the way employee evaluate his or psychological contract (e.g., Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Organizations can manage the adjustment of newcomers through the adoption of socialization tactics defined as “ways in which the experiences of individuals in transition from one role to another are structured for them by others in the organization” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 250). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) proposed six bipolar tactics that organizations can use to structure the socialization experiences of newcomers (i.e., collective *vs.* individual, formal *vs.* informal, sequential *vs.* random, fixed *vs.* variable, serial *vs.* disjunctive, investiture *vs.* divestiture) thereby influencing the role orientations that newcomers ultimately adopt and their subsequent adjustment to the organization. These tactics can be arranged on a single continuum from individualized to institutionalized socialization (e.g., Bauer et al., 1998). Institutionalized tactics reflect a structured program of socialization that provides information to reduce uncertainty and anxiety inherent in early work experiences. It also encourages

newcomers to passively accept pre-set roles thus maintaining the status quo. Individualized socialization tactics reflect a relative absence of structure creating ambiguity thereby encouraging newcomers to challenge the status quo and develop their own approaches to situations (Ashforth & Saks, 1996).

Notwithstanding organizational influences, newcomers also have a powerful motivator to make their psychological contract schema more complete by actively searching for additional information as this will reduce uncertainty and make their experiences more predictable (Shore & Tetrick, 1994). Work in the socialization literature have also emphasized the usefulness of proactivity on the part of the newcomer (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Major & Kozlowski, 1997; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a, 1993b; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Reichers, 1987; Saks & Ashforth, 1996; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). As the organization cannot possibly provide all of the information and socialization that an employee needs, the employee must make some proactive efforts to learn how things are done (Schein, 1968) and to “become fully adjusted insiders” (Fisher, 1985, p. 39).

Information seeking, as one form of employee proactivity seems to be particularly relevant to newcomers because “as schemas, psychological contracts are often relatively incomplete in their initial phases, motivating individuals to seek out and integrate new information to better understand their employment relationship” (Rousseau, 2001, p. 523). It can be viewed as a process that newcomers use to reduce uncertainty and make sense of their new situation (Saks & Ashforth, 1997a) thereby expediting their own socialization (Morrison, 1993a, 1993b; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Empirical evidence supports the contention that frequency of information seeking is positively related to newcomer adjustment (e.g., Morrison, 1993a; Morrison, 1993b; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

## HYPOTHESES

### **Antecedents of Information Seeking**

Organizations can influence the information seeking behaviors of newcomers through its socialization tactics. Wanous and Colella (1989) highlight the importance of informational mechanisms in explaining the relationship between socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment. The type of socialization tactics adopted by the organization may influence the degree and type of information provided to newcomers and also the opportunities available to newcomers to acquire information. Institutionalized socialization tactics provide newcomers with information that reduces uncertainty (Jones, 1986) and opportunities to acquire information (e.g., Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b). According to Mignerey et al. (1995) institutionalized socialization tactics “provide a structure that enables newcomers to communicate more readily with coworkers and superiors. With such a structure in place, newcomers are better able to obtain information, about the organization and reduce the uncertainty associated with assimilation into a new work environment” (p. 77).

Empirical research has shown that institutionalized socialization tactics are related to more frequent information acquisition because they provide newcomers with formalized and structured opportunities to interact with insiders in contrast to individualized socialization that is more informal and reflects a relative absence of structure (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1997). Therefore, because institutionalized socialization tactics involve more information-laden experiences (Jones, 1986), provide newcomers with formal opportunities to work with and interact with insiders, and reflect a more structured program of socialization (Ashforth et al., 1997; Mignerey et al., 1995), we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 1: Institutionalized socialization tactics are positively related to the frequency of information seeking behaviors.*



A second influence on newcomer proactivity (i.e., information seeking behavior) is the dispositional characteristics of the newcomer (Reichers, 1987). Jones (1983) and Morrison (1993a) highlight the importance of examining dispositional factors in order to more fully comprehend newcomer proactivity. Here, we focus on two dispositional characteristics: proactive personality and general self-efficacy.

Proactive personality, as defined by Crant (2000), refers to an individual's propensity engage in proactive behavior, that is, to take action to influence their environment. Bateman and Crant (1993) initially introduced the construct to depict differences among individuals in the degree to which they search out opportunities and strive to challenge and modify their current surroundings. Proactive individuals actively identify opportunities to make change and are likely to persist until such changes have occurred. In contrast, less proactive individuals fail to search out and identify opportunities for change and rather passively adapt to the status quo. In the context of socialization, proactive individuals will be more likely to influence their situation by engaging in information seeking behaviors. Because proactive individuals are motivated to attain personal goals, we expect that they will be more inclined than less proactive individuals to actively seek information as this enables them to search out opportunities and to challenge and modify their current surroundings. We explore this with the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2a: Proactive personality is positively related to the frequency of information seeking behaviors.*

Although research on self-efficacy has focused mainly on task-specific self-efficacy (SSE), Eden (1988; 1996) has suggested that a more general, trait-like aspects of self-efficacy (i.e., general self-efficacy) is also useful when one is trying to understand performance over time. Eden (1996) defined general self-efficacy (GSE) as "one's estimate of one's overall

ability to perform successfully in a wide variety of challenging achievement situations” (p. 9). GSE captures individual differences in people's tendency to view themselves as capable of meeting task demands in a wide variety of situations. Several researchers (Eden, 1988, 1996; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998) have proposed that GSE is a trait-like construct that captures the generality dimension of self-efficacy (cf., Bandura, 1997).

The empirical evidence linking self-efficacy to information seeking behaviors is mixed. Brown, Ganesan and Challangalla (2001) found that individuals high on self-efficacy were more likely to engage in information seeking behaviors whereas Major and Kozlowski (1997) empirically demonstrate that newcomers low in self-efficacy were more likely to engage in information seeking behaviors, especially when task interdependence and accessibility are high. Following Major and Kozlowski (1997), we argue that individuals high in self-efficacy will be less likely to search out additional information as they view themselves as capable of meeting the demands confronting them and are more self sufficient. Two forces may motivate proactivity in low self-efficacy newcomers (Major & Kozlowski, 1997). First, the newcomer's low self-efficacy may be a reflection of the lack of competence or task mastery, whether real or imagined (Major & Kozlowski, 1997). Therefore, low self-efficacy may prompt newcomers to search for task help, guidance and reassurance from others to overcome the perceived deficiency or better meet work responsibilities (Morrison, 1993b). Second, anxiety may compel the low self-efficacy newcomer to proactively seek information (Louis, 1980). The low self-efficacy newcomer is more likely to be feeling anxious (Saks, 1994) and may seek information as a means of anxiety reduction.

*Hypothesis 2b: Self-efficacy is negatively related to the frequency of information seeking behaviors.*

## **Antecedents of Perceived Psychological Contract Fulfillment**

The primary theoretical models on factors shaping employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment are presented by Rousseau (1995) and Morrison and Robinson (1997). However, Ho and Levesque (2005) argue that both models ignore the role of social influence in shaping how individuals evaluate the fulfillment of the psychological contract. This influence may be particularly important in the context of newcomers, as by their very nature, newcomers have limited experience in the organization and hence incomplete information on the nature of their employment relationship. Therefore, they may be more open to the effects of social influences based on their desire to reduce uncertainty and to have greater predictability in their exchange relationship with the employer.

Initial empirical evidence supports the contention that third parties influence how employees evaluate psychological contract fulfillment (Ho & Levesque, 2005). We argue that information seeking behaviors can assist newcomers in interpreting promises made by the employer as well as evaluating how well those promises have been met. As noted by Rousseau (2001), the social context and in particular information received from coworkers and supervisors can aid employees in interpreting their employer's signals (either signals relating to obligations of the employer or employee obligations to the employer). Thus, newcomers may test out their interpretations of their obligations to the employer or the employer's obligations to them as a way of checking "the reality" of their understanding of their psychological contract. This may lead to a revision of the terms of the exchange based on feedback from the social context that improves the accuracy of the newcomer's psychological contract schema. In addition, newcomers in evaluating how well the employer has fulfilled its obligations may revise their evaluative judgment based on influences from peers and supervisor. The same influence is also hypothesized to influence newcomers'

perceptions of their obligations to the employer as well as their evaluation of how well they are meeting those obligations. We examine this with the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3a: Information seeking behaviors are positively related to perceived fulfillment of employer obligations.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Information seeking behaviors are positively related to perceived fulfillment of employee obligations.*

The previous hypothesis views newcomers as taking a proactive role in managing their relationship with the organization. However, consistent with a traditional approach to socialization, organizations can also purposefully manage the adjustment of newcomers through its socialization tactics. Research demonstrates a positive relationship between institutionalized tactics and perceived value congruence (Grant & Bush, 1996) and person-organization fit (Cable & Parsons, 2001). As this research suggests, organizations can take steps to ensure greater congruence between employees and the organization.

Given that newcomers have incomplete psychological contract schema, they are more amenable to change than when they are completely formed. Rousseau (2001) argues that trusted, clear and explicit sources of information that are consistently portrayed are more likely to identify what employees and organizational representatives need to do to fulfill their obligations to each other. Guest and Conway (2002) found that job and recruitment related information was negatively associated with perceived contract breach. Thus, it would appear that providing high-quality information is one effective mechanism for minimizing the occurrence of contract breach. In this respect, socialization tactics adopted by the organization may influence the degree and type of information provided to newcomers and also the opportunities available to newcomers to acquire information. By providing newcomers with formalized and structured opportunities to interact with organizational

insiders, newcomers are more likely to develop an accurate and realistic schema of what is expected to occur in the organization and what is expected of him/her in return. Based on Morrison and Robinson's (1997) argumentation, we argue that socialization, and more especially socialization tactics will affect the degree of similarity between the newcomer's schema regarding the employment relationship and the schema held by organizational agents. When organizations rely on a highly institutionalized socialization process, we expect newcomers to have a similar interpretation of the exchange to that held by agents of the organization. This implies more congruence, and hence a higher probability of perceiving that each party has fulfilled its commitments towards the other. Therefore we propose the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4a: Institutionalized socialization tactics are positively related to perceived fulfillment of employer obligations.*

*Hypothesis 4b: Institutionalized socialization tactics are positively related to perceived fulfillment of employee obligations.*

## **METHOD**

### **Sample and Procedure**

The data for this study were collected in three waves over a year amongst newcomers in three large Belgian organizations. At Time 1, the survey was administered to 537 newcomers, of which 364 responded (67%). At Time 2 (six months subsequent to organizational entry), of the 364 respondents at Time 1, 241 responded yielding a 66% response rate. 159 responded to the Time 3 survey (six months subsequent to time 2) giving a response rate of 66%. The time intervals were based on socialization literature research suggesting that 6 months and 12 months are meaningful intervals in the socialization process (Bauer et al., 1998). Respondents were assigned a unique ID so that we could match their

surveys at the three different time periods.

At Time 3, respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 52 years with a mean of 28 years. 54% of respondents were men. Degree-related work experience ranged from 0 to 33 years, with an average of 4 years and 1 month. No significant differences were found between newcomers who responded to Time 1 and 2 and those who responded to Time 1 only and no significant differences were found between those who responded to Time 2 and 3 and those who responded at Time 2 only.

### **Measures**

All measures were submitted to exploratory factor analysis to assess unidimensionality and convergent and discriminant validity. Items used in the final measures had factor loadings greater than .5 on the intended construct and no cross loadings greater than .25. Except where otherwise noted, all measures were based on a 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) with *neither agree nor disagree* (3) as the midpoint.

***Proactive personality.*** Proactive personality was measured at the Time 1. The degree of proactive personality was assessed with a ten-item shortened version of Bateman and Crant's (1993) 17-item Proactive Personality Scale. The shortened version of this scale is comprised of the 10 items with the highest average factor loadings based on results reported by Bateman and Crant (1993). This shortened scale has demonstrated adequate levels of reliability and construct validity in previous research (e.g., Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). Proactive personality measures individual's ability to anticipate future needs and respond to them. A sample item includes "If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen". Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.80.

**General self-efficacy.** General self-efficacy was measured at the Time 1. The degree of general self-efficacy was assessed with the eight-item New General Self-Efficacy Scale (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001). This scale has demonstrated adequate levels of reliability, construct validity and stability over time in past research (e.g., Chen et al., 2001; Chen, Gully, Whiteman, & Kilcullen, 2000). This measure captures an individual's beliefs relating to having the ability and resources to perform successfully in a wide variety of challenging achievement situations. A sample item includes "I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks". Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.84.

**Information seeking behaviors.** Information seeking behaviors were measured at the Time 2. The extent to which employees proactively gather information from their immediate supervisor and their coworkers was assessed using two five-item scales developed by Ashford & Black (1996). We asked how frequently in the past six months study participants sought five different types of information from their supervisor and from coworkers. These included: (a) overall job performance (appraisal information), (b) role demands and expectations (referent information), (c) values and attitudes of the firm (social information), (d) technical aspects of the job (technical information), and (e) expected behaviors and attitudes (normative information). Respondents were asked to answer the ten items along a five-point scale scored as follows: (1) "never"; (2) "a few times a month"; (3) "a few times a week"; (4) "once a day"; and (5) "a few times a day". Factor analysis produced distinct factors based on the source of information: supervisor and coworkers. Cronbach's alpha was .80 for both scales.

**Socialization tactics.** Socialization tactics were measured at the Time 2. Newcomers reported the socialization tactics they experienced in their organizations by responding to questions from the socialization scale developed by Jones (1986). Jones (1986) developed six five-item self-report scales to operationalize socialization tactics. Given the longitudinal nature of this research and our concerns about response rate, we elected to keep the survey as

short as possible and did not employ all of Jones' (1986) 30 items. Instead, we selected eighteen items: three items from each of the six socialization tactics that loaded highest on Jones' proposed socialization factors (i.e., context, content, and social aspects). This approach has been used in other studies (e.g., Cable & Parsons, 2001).

We conducted a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation on the socialization items. Results revealed a 3-factor solution (with eigenvalues greater than 1) that accounted for 68% of the variance and clearly supported Jones' (1986) 3-factor conceptualization. The factors representing distinct dimensions of socialization were sufficiently internally consistent to combine into single composite indices of dimensions of socialization tactics. The items of each socialization tactics dimension were averaged to form a scale, with higher values representing a greater degree of institutionalized context, content and social aspects. Cronbach's alpha was 0.80 for the context scale, 0.91 for the content scale, and 0.84 for the social scale.

***Perceived fulfillment of employer obligations.*** Perceived fulfillment of employer obligations were measured at Time 3 using a thirty-four item scale tapping the typical dimensions of the employment relationship studied in previous research (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman, 2004; De Vos et al., 2003; Rousseau, 1990; Shore & Barksdale, 1998): (1) salary and rewards; (2) job content; (3) social atmosphere; (4) job security and stability; (5) development opportunities; (6) work-life balance, (7) work environment. Respondents were asked to indicate to which extent they believed that their employer had provided the list of employer obligations along a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "not at all" to (5) "to a very great extent". Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.94.

***Perceived fulfillment of employee obligations.*** Perceived fulfillment of employee obligations were assessed with a thirty-four item scale tapping the typical dimensions of the employment relationship studied in previous research (e.g., Coyle-Shapiro & Neuman, 2004;



De Vos et al., 2003; Rousseau, 1990; Shore & Barksdale, 1998): (1) performance; (2) ethics and integrity; (3) commitment and loyalty; (4) adaptation and flexibility; (5) working relationships; and (6) update and development of skills, knowledge and abilities.

Respondents were asked to indicate to which extent they believed that they in practice fulfilled the list of obligations along a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “not at all” to (5) “to a very great extent”. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.88.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables. We tested the remaining hypotheses using hierarchical multiple regression controlling for gender, age, number of jobs and length of prior work experience in step 1 of all the equations.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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Hypothesis 1 predicted that socialization tactics would be positively related to the frequency of information seeking. As Table 2 shows, the content of socialization is positively related to information seeking behaviors toward the supervisor ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) and the context of socialization is positively related to information seeking behaviors from coworkers ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) providing partial support for hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2a is supported. Proactive personality is positively related to information seeking toward the supervisor ( $\beta = .22, p < .01$ ) and information seeking toward coworkers ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ). However, hypothesis 2b is not supported as general self-efficacy is not related to information seeking behaviors.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b suggested that information seeking behaviors would be positively related to perceived fulfillment of employer and employee obligations. As Table 3

shows, information seeking toward the supervisor is positively related to perceived fulfillment of employer obligations ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ), thus providing partial support for hypothesis 3a.

Information seeking toward coworkers is positively related to perceived fulfillment of employee obligations ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ) thus providing partial support for hypothesis 3b.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b suggested that socialization tactics would be positively related to perceived fulfillment of employer and employee obligations. As Table 3 shows, the content ( $\beta = .19, p < .05$ ), the context ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ) and social aspects ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ) of socialization are positively to perceived fulfillment of employer obligations thus supporting hypothesis 4a. The context ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ) and social aspects ( $\beta = .20, p < .05$ ) of socialization are also positively to perceived fulfillment of employee obligations, while the content of socialization is not. Thus, hypothesis 4b is partially supported.

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Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here  
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## **DISCUSSION**

In answering the call for additional research on psychological contracts during organizational socialization (Rousseau, 2001; Taylor & Tekleab, 2004), our study suggests that newcomer proactivity and socialization tactics exert important influences on how newcomers evaluate their psychological contract.

First, our findings highlight the importance of socialization tactics and proactive personality in affecting information seeking behaviors. In relation to the former, a key finding is that the socialization dimensions have a differential effect on information seeking behavior toward different sources. Although previous empirical research has demonstrated that an institutionalized approach to socialization is positively related to newcomers' opportunities to acquire information (Chao, Kozlowski, Major, & Gardner, 1994; Cooper-

Thomas & Anderson, 2002; Mignerey et al., 1995; Saks & Ashforth, 1997b), by adopting Jones' (1986) 3-factor conceptualization of socialization tactics, we were able to discern differences amongst the effect of socialization dimensions. When newcomers experienced sequential and fixed socialization (i.e., they received information concerning the sequences and timetables associated with career progression), they are more likely to seek information from their supervisor than when they experienced variable and random socialization. This may be a result of newcomers' viewing supervisors as having greater knowledge concerning potential career development. Newcomers were more likely to seek information from their coworkers when they experienced collective and formal socialization than when they experienced individual and informal socialization. Presumably, when newcomers experienced collective and formal socialization (i.e., they are put together and they are provided with a common set of learning experiences and off-the-job training), it facilitates opportunities to access and seek out information from other newcomers.

Consistent with empirical evidence (Major & Kozlowski, 1997; Morrison, Chen, & Salgado, 2004; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), our results highlight the importance of considering dispositional characteristics in understanding newcomers' information seeking behavior. In particular, newcomers with higher proactive personality were more likely to seek information from their supervisor and from their coworkers. Because proactive individuals actively identify opportunities to make change and are likely to persist until such changes have occurred, they are more likely to engage in information seeking behaviors to attain their personal goals. By showing that information-seeking is affected by proactive personality, our research confirms the idea that newcomers vary in the extent to which they proactively engage in behaviors (Reichers, 1987). Specifically, this study extends findings that have related proactive information seeking to a limited number of individual-difference variables, including self-efficacy (Major & Kozlowski, 1997), extraversion (Wanberg & Kammeyer-

Mueller, 2000), and self-assertiveness (Morrison et al., 2004). However, we found no support for the effect of general self-efficacy in predicting information seeking behaviors. This sits in contrast to other empirical research that supports a positive (Brown et al., 2001) and a negative (Major & Kozlowski, 1997) relationship between self-efficacy and information seeking behaviors.

In looking at the consequences of information seeking behaviors, our results show that the sources of information seeking (i.e., coworkers and supervisor) play a distinct role in newcomers' evaluation of how well they perceive the employer as fulfilling its psychological contract and also how well they report fulfilling their psychological contract to the employer. Specifically, newcomers reported a higher perception of fulfillment of employer obligations when they engage in information seeking from their supervisor. Because the immediate supervisor can be viewed as a representative of the organization and as a purveyor of resources (Liden, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2004), newcomers who seek information from their supervisor are likely to have more accurate perceptions regarding the organization's obligations to them which in turn may lead to a more positive evaluation of how well the organization has fulfilled those obligations. This confirms the role of the supervisor as the chief organizational agent in establishing and maintaining the psychological contract (Shore & Tetrick, 1994) particularly during organizational socialization.

In evaluating their own psychological contract fulfillment, newcomers who engaged in information seeking from coworkers reported higher fulfillment of their obligations to the employer. By seeking information from their coworkers, newcomers are more likely to gain more accurate interpretations of what is expected of them by the organization. They may also use coworkers as referents in evaluating how well they are fulfilling their obligations to the organization. Using coworkers for information is a less risky strategy for newcomers than seeking information from the supervisor in terms of how well they are fulfilling their side of

the exchange. Together, these results suggest that newcomers rely on different informational sources in evaluating the degree to which they perceive themselves and their employer as fulfilling their respective obligations. This extends the findings of Ho and Levesque (2005) by differentiating between sources of social influence for the evaluation of each party's fulfillment of their obligations.

Furthermore, socialization tactics are also important in shaping newcomers' evaluation of their psychological contract. Newcomers are more likely to perceive that they have fulfilled their own obligations towards the organization when they experienced serial and investiture-oriented socialization (i.e., they received positive social support from experienced organizational members) than when they experienced disjunctive and divestiture-oriented socialization. Presumably, interacting with experienced organizational members that act as role models and receiving social support help newcomers to fulfill their obligations towards the organization. In addition, our results also revealed that newcomers were more likely to perceive that their organization had fulfilled obligations towards them when they experienced institutionalized socialization. First, newcomers report a higher perception of fulfillment of employer obligations when they experienced collective and formal (i.e., they are provided with a common set of learning experiences and off-the-job training) socialization than when they experienced individual and informal socialization. Indeed, formal and collective practices are designed by organizations to ensure that newcomers receive a common message about the organization's values and how they should interpret and respond to situations (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Second, newcomers report a higher perception of fulfillment of employer obligations when they experienced sequential and fixed (i.e., they received information concerning the sequences and timetables associated with career progression) socialization than when they experienced variable and random socialization. Finally, newcomers report a higher perception of fulfillment of employer obligations when

they experienced serial and investiture (i.e., they had the opportunity to access and to learn from insiders) socialization than when they experienced disjunctive and divestiture socialization.

In summary, this study extends both psychological contract and socialization literatures in a number of ways. First, while previous socialization literature has confirmed the role of newcomer proactive behaviors and socialization tactics on newcomer adjustment, our research also suggests that these key variables in the socialization process also influence psychological contract fulfillment by affecting newcomers' evaluation of how each party has fulfilled its obligations towards the other. Second, this research responds to previous calls for additional research on the formation of the psychological contract and on the development of contract breach (De Vos et al., 2003; Robinson & Morrison, 2000; Rousseau, 2001). With this research, we advance knowledge on how psychological contract fulfillment is influenced by both the individual and organization during organizational socialization. Finally, our findings suggest that how an individual evaluates their psychological contract is better understood and studied in a social context.

### **Limitations**

In interpreting the findings of this study, the following limitations must be considered. A first concern in our research is that it relied on self-reports. However, self-report data is generally accepted both in organizational socialization research when the research is concerned with determining newcomer perceptions and in psychological contract research because the evaluation of the psychological is inherently idiosyncratic and subjective. Moreover, past research has argued for the usefulness of subjective measures over and above objective techniques (Kristof, 1996; Nicholson & West, 1988) and has shown self-reports to have greater predictive power than more objective methods (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). Although self-reports of personality, information seeking, socialization tactics, and

psychological contract fulfillment were appropriate, future research should supplement self-reports with data from supervisors and/or from coworkers, for assessing level of socialization and fulfillment of obligations.

A related issue concerns the potential for common method variance since all the variables were assessed using survey measures, which may have inflated the observed relationships. Several factors mitigate some concern about common method variance. First, the use of multiple measurement occasions reduces but does not eliminate all common method bias. As such, different patterns of relationships were observed for the relationships between personality, information seeking, socialization tactics, and perceived psychological contract fulfillment. Second, the measures of some constructs (e.g., perceived fulfillment of employee obligations) may have been inflated due to self-enhancement bias. However, as Robinson and Morrison (2000) noted, this bias actually makes it more difficult to find a significant effect for these variables. Indeed, inflated reports of perceived psychological contract fulfillment would create range restrictions on these variables, and would reduce the magnitude of the observed relationships between perceived psychological contract fulfillment and its antecedents. Finally, Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) propose that asking respondents to give a large number of ratings, as occurred in the current research, reduces the likelihood that self reports lead to increased common method variance through memory effects. Consequently, although method variance is a concern, it is not a likely explanation for the major findings of this study.

A final limitation is that no account was taken of the potential change from Time 1 to Time 3 when the dependent variables were measured. If major changes have occurred during the socialization process (e.g., change of supervisor), this may have introduced a measurement error into the results. However, capturing the antecedents and the dependent variables at different measurement occasions is common in socialization research.

## **Practical Implications**

To the extent that a firm's success depends on the effective management of the psychological contract, this study suggests that through an effective socialization process, newcomers can more easily make sense of mutual obligations inherent in the employment relationship. By investing in socialization tactics, organizations can reap valuable returns as newcomers positively evaluate how each party has fulfilled its commitments towards the other. Specifically, a highly institutionalized socialization process (i.e., content, context and social aspects of socialization) appears to represent "best practices" in terms of helping newcomers perceive that their organization has fulfilled their obligations toward them and also influencing newcomer adjustment by helping them to fulfill their duties and obligations associated with their new role.

In addition, organizations should provide initiatives (e.g., training, mentoring), incentives, and/or support for encouraging newcomers' information seeking during organizational entry. Although such strategies are somewhat risky in that they are stressful, they appear to offer an effective means for helping newcomers to develop a more accurate mental schema of the employment relationship. Thus, as suggested by Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992), organizations should encourage new employees to engage in these strategies, but should also try to minimize their negative impact, perhaps through stress reduction programs and increasing the availability of interpersonal sources for providing a social support network.

Finally, the key role played by supervisors and coworkers during socialization suggests that that organizations would benefit if insiders (newcomers' coworkers and supervisors) were given training to understand how best to help newcomers (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). On the one hand, socialization research suggests that coworkers are important during socialization for learning about social and normative information (Morrison, 1993a). On the other hand, supervisors are not only key models for newcomers, but they also



mediate information from the broader organizational context, especially for job- and performance-related information (Morrison, 1993a). Therefore, it might be beneficial to develop socialization programs, which train organizational insiders to facilitate newcomers' socialization as well as to encourage newcomers to adopt useful learning strategies by emphasizing what content areas are important and how to learn about them.

### **Future Research**

Our study focused on two predictors (proactive personality and general self-efficacy) of newcomer information seeking. However, we believe that the search for additional determinants of information seeking is critical because of its role in the newcomer adjustment during organizational socialization. Based on previous theoretical work (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 2002; Reichers, 1987), we encourage researchers to identify additional dispositional and situational factors that are likely to affect the perceived value of information and the risks a newcomer will be willing to take to gather information.

In looking at the consequences of information seeking behaviors on psychological contract fulfillment, our results showed that the degree of information seeking from different sources (i.e., coworkers and supervisor) played a significant and distinct role in newcomers' evaluation of how well they perceive the employer as fulfilling its psychological contract and also how well they report fulfilling their psychological contract to the employer. Future work could explore whether different of information (appraisal information, referent information, social information, technical information and normative information) differentially impact newcomers' evaluation of psychological contact fulfillment.

Future research could also explore potential mechanisms linking socialization tactics and proactive information to newcomers' evaluation of their psychological contract. This relationship might be explained by a decrease of newcomer expectations and/or an increase in congruence between newcomers' and organizational insiders' schemas. Based on the realistic

job preview literature, we argue that information seeking and socialization tactics may positively affect the evaluation of psychological contract fulfillment through the development of more realistic perceptions of employee and employer obligations. Newcomers tend to have inflated expectations about some aspects of a new job (Wanous, 1982, 1992). By seeking information from different organizational sources and by experiencing an institutionalized socialization process, newcomers develop more realistic information about the mutual obligations included in their psychological contract. Through these socialization processes, newcomers may come to place less value upon previously anticipated positive aspects that do not actually occur, and erect defenses against formerly unanticipated negative aspects that do actually occur. As a result, proactive newcomers that experience institutionalized socialization are more likely to positively evaluate the fulfillment of their psychological contract.

Based on the psychological contract literature, we also believe that information seeking and socialization tactics may positively affect the evaluation of psychological contract fulfillment by enhancing the congruence of the schema of newcomers and organizational insiders. Drawing on Morrison and Robinson (1997, 2004), we argue that information seeking and socialization tactics affect the degree of similarity between an employee's schema regarding the employment relationship and the schema held by organizational agents. When newcomers seek out information from organizational insiders about the employment relationship (i.e., expected contributions and inducements) and when newcomers experience a socialization process that is fairly institutionalized, newcomers are more likely to develop a schema that is similar to those held by agents of the organization. This implies less incongruence, and hence a higher probability that the psychological contract will be positively evaluated. Future research could empirically test these potential mediating factors.

## **Conclusion**

This study extends psychological contract theory by examining how newcomers evaluate their psychological contract in the early stages of their relationship with their employer. The findings highlight the importance of social influence in affecting how newcomers evaluate the fulfillment of their psychological contract. In addition, the socialization tactics adopted by organizations influenced the degree to which newcomers evaluated the fulfillment of their own obligations as well as the fulfillment of the employer's obligations.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables**

| Variable                    | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4     | 5      | 6    | 7      | 8      | 9      | 10     | 11   | 12     | 13 |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|--------|----|
| 1. Gender                   | 1,47        | 0,50      | –      |        |        |       |        |      |        |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 2. Age                      | 28,63       | 7,14      | -,25** | –      |        |       |        |      |        |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 3. Number of jobs           | 1,39        | 1,46      | -,20*  | ,76*** | –      |       |        |      |        |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 4. Months of experience     | 58,55       | 80,04     | -,19*  | ,91*** | ,76*** | –     |        |      |        |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 5. Proactive personality    | 3,64        | 0,48      | -,13   | ,13    | ,16*   | ,03   | –      |      |        |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 6. Self-efficacy            | 3,92        | 0,46      | -,17*  | ,21**  | ,19*   | ,18*  | ,32*** | –    |        |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 7. Content of soc.          | 2,86        | 0,97      | ,10    | -,18*  | -,22** | -,16* | ,04    | ,09  | –      |        |        |        |      |        |    |
| 8. Context of soc.          | 3,18        | 0,85      | ,05    | ,03    | -,05   | -,05  | ,07    | -,10 | ,47*** | –      |        |        |      |        |    |
| 9. Social aspects of soc.   | 3,70        | 0,80      | -,06   | -,07   | -,09   | -,07  | -,08   | ,06  | ,23**  | ,22**  | –      |        |      |        |    |
| 10. IS from supervisor      | 2,61        | 0,80      | ,01    | ,10    | ,00    | ,00   | ,23**  | ,05  | ,21**  | ,19*   | ,06    | –      |      |        |    |
| 11. IS from colleagues      | 2,49        | 0,81      | -,09   | -,01   | -,02   | -,01  | ,24**  | ,08  | ,16*   | ,21**  | -,04   | ,45*** | –    |        |    |
| 12. Fulf. of Er Obligations | 3,56        | 0,52      | -,02   | -,03   | -,07   | -,04  | ,03    | -,02 | ,37*** | ,36*** | ,39*** | ,18*   | ,02  | –      |    |
| 13. Fulf. of Ee Obligations | 4,15        | 0,40      | ,08    | ,08    | ,02    | ,03   | ,19*   | ,19* | ,26*** | ,25**  | ,28*** | ,14    | ,17* | ,45*** | –  |

*Note.* Content of soc. = context of socialization; context of soc. = context of socialization; social aspects of soc. = social aspects of socialization; Fulf. of Er Obligations = perceived fulfillment of employer obligations; Fulf. of Ee Obligations = perceived fulfillment of employee obligations; IS from supervisor = information seeking from supervisor; IS from colleagues = information seeking from colleagues.

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \* $p \leq .05$

**TABLE 2**  
**Predictors of Information Seeking Behaviors**

| Predictor Variables             | Information-Seeking<br>from the Supervisor |       |              | Information-Seeking<br>from the Colleagues |       |              |
|---------------------------------|--|-------|--------------|--|-------|--------------|
|                                 | $\beta$                                    | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\beta$                                    | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
| Step 1                          |  | .07   |              |  | .01   |              |
| Gender                          | .05  |       |              | -.10                                       |       |              |
| Age                             | .63**                                      |       |              | -.03                                       |       |              |
| Number of jobs                  | -.12                                       |       |              | -.03                                       |       |              |
| Years of experience             | -.48*                                      |       |              | .01  |       |              |
| <b>Main effect :</b>            |  |       |              |  |       |              |
| <b>Socialization Dimensions</b> |  |       |              |  |       |              |
| Step 2                          |  | .12   | .05*         |  | .08   | .07*         |
| Content                         | .21*                                       |       |              | .09  |       |              |
| Context                         | .04  |       |              | .21*                                       |       |              |
| Social                          | .02  |       |              | -.11                                       |       |              |
| <b>Main effect :</b>            |  |       |              |  |       |              |
| <b>Proactive personality</b>    |  |       |              |  |       |              |
| Step 2                          |  | .11   | .04**        |  | .07   | .06**        |
| Proactive personality           | .21**                                      |       |              | .25**                                      |       |              |
| <b>Main effect :</b>            |  |       |              |  |       |              |
| <b>Self-Efficacy</b>            |  |       |              |  |       |              |
| Step 2                          |  | .07   | .002         |  | .01   | .005         |
| Self-efficacy                   | .05  |       |              | .07  |       |              |

*Note.* \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*  $p \leq .05$

**TABLE 3**  
**Predictors of Psychological Contract Fulfillment**

| Predictor Variables             | Perceived Fulfillment<br>of Employer<br>Obligations |       |              | Perceived Fulfillment<br>of Employee<br>Obligations |       |              |
|---------------------------------|---|-------|--------------|---|-------|--------------|
|                                 | $\beta$   | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $\beta$   | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
| Step 1                          |   | .01   |              |   | .04   |              |
| Gender                          | -.03  |       |              | .12   |       |              |
| Age                             | .05   |       |              | .37   |       |              |
| Number of jobs                  | -.12  |       |              | -.05  |       |              |
| Years of experience             | -.01  |       |              | -.24  |       |              |
| <b>Main effect :</b>            |   |       |              |   |       |              |
| <b>Information-seeking (IS)</b> |   |       |              |   |       |              |
| Step 2                          |   | .05   | .04*         |   | .07   | .03*         |
| IS from the supervisor          | .24**   |       |              | .03   |       |              |
| IS from the colleagues          | -.10  |       |              | .17*  |       |              |
| <b>Main effect :</b>            |   |       |              |   |       |              |
| <b>Socialization Dimensions</b> |   |       |              |   |       |              |
| Step 2                          |   | .23   | .22***       |   | .14   | .10***       |
| Content                         | .19*  |       |              | .06   |       |              |
| Context                         | .21*  |       |              | .18*  |       |              |
| Social                          | .27***  |       |              | .20*  |       |              |

*Note.* \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \* $p \leq .05$