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The Interactive Effects of Socialization Tactics and Work Locus of Control on Newcomer Work
Adjustment, Job Embeddedness, and Voluntary Turnover

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Abstract

Previous research has tended to focus on general best practices for onboarding organizational newcomers. In this study, we shift the conversation to instead address the question: for *whom* are certain socialization tactics more or less beneficial? Whereas institutionalized socialization tactics provide considerable structure intended to reduce uncertainty and help newcomers adjust, less is known about whether and how individual psychological differences cause some newcomers to react differently to the same socialization tactics. To examine the interplay between organizational socialization efforts and newcomer individual differences, we hypothesize that newcomers' work locus of control (WLOC) moderates the relationship between socialization tactics and voluntary turnover. We also examine the indirect role of newcomer

work adjustment—role clarity, work mastery, social integration—and job embeddedness in transmitting the interaction between socialization tactics and WLOC to turnover. Data collected from 676 newcomers at four time points over 12 months in various organizations provided general support for our hypotheses: Newcomers with an external WLOC showed higher social integration and embeddedness and lower turnover under institutionalized socialization tactics, but lower social integration and embeddedness and higher turnover under individualized tactics. Their turnover was also reduced (about nine times) from individualized to institutionalized tactics. In contrast, newcomers with an internal WLOC were less influenced by either socialization tactic approach in terms of their social integration, embeddedness, or turnover.

Keywords: Newcomer socialization tactics; work locus of control; voluntary turnover; work adjustment; job embeddedness

The Interactive Effects of Socialization Tactics and Work Locus of Control on Newcomer Work Adjustment, Job Embeddedness, and Voluntary Turnover

Joining an organization is often characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty (Louis, 1980). Just as newcomers seek to reduce this uncertainty, organizations also have an interest in acclimating new hires as quickly as possible, given that ineffective socialization is a frequently cited reason for early turnover (Feldman, 1988), creating significant financial and operational strains (Griffeth and Hom, 2001). Organizations can help reduce turnover through socialization tactics that affect the types/sources of information newcomers receive, and how this information is communicated (Bauer et al., 2007; Fang et al., 2011; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

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Whereas research has shown that socialization tactics predict a range of newcomer outcomes (Bauer et al., 2007), less is known about whether certain tactics work systematically better or worse for different newcomers (for exceptions, see Ashforth et al., 1998; Li et al., 2011; Zahhly and Tosi, 1989). Studying individual differences in the context of newcomer socialization is important for at least two reasons. For one, newcomers vary in how much they expect and need organizations to help them adjust. By examining how individual differences interact with tactics, we can better understand why socialization efforts sometimes fail, and tailor onboarding programs to particular newcomers to expedite their socialization (Reichers, 1987). Second, there is value in assessing the comparative effects of socialization tactics for different newcomers. Institutionalized tactics are costlier than individualized tactics, as they entail more structured and intensive organizational involvement to help newcomers “learn the ropes”. Yet, for newcomers who feel greater responsibility for their own adjustment, institutionalized efforts might yield a more limited return on investment.

We propose that work locus of control (WLOC) is one particularly useful individual difference that captures the above predisposition. WLOC describes personal control beliefs at work, and whether agency over work outcomes lies primarily with the employee him- or herself (i.e., “internals”) or with outside forces, such as the organization (i.e., “externals”) (Rotter, 1966; Spector, 1988). Drawing from uncertainty management theory (Berger, 1979; Miller and Jablin, 1991) and newcomer socialization research, we propose that internals, who tend to be “masters of their own fates”, will be less affected by socialization tactics in terms of their proximal work adjustment (role clarity, work mastery, and social integration; Jones, 1986) and job embeddedness (i.e., a set of forces that constrain a person from leaving a job; Mitchell et al., 2001), whereas externals, who tend to believe their outcomes largely result from luck,

circumstance, or other outside factors, will become better adjusted and more embedded under more structured institutionalized tactics, yet may fare worse under more laissez-faire individualized tactics. Subsequently, and consistent with prior newcomer research, we expect that work adjustment and embeddedness will negatively predict newcomer voluntary turnover. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized model and relationships.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Institutional tactics are generally positively related to work adjustment (Bauer et al., 2007), and internal WLOC tends to be positively related to work motivation and performance (Ng et al., 2006). However, we propose that internals can actually benefit *less* from institutionalized tactics and are more likely to thrive in an individualized socialization environment. This presents a puzzle for organizational leaders regarding how to allocate resources to best serve all newcomers. Thus, we provide additional theoretical and practical nuance to research on newcomer adjustment and the moderating role of WLOC. Despite being a relevant trait for work settings (Ng et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2010), WLOC has received little attention in research on newcomer adjustment. A recent review (Galvin et al., 2018) highlighted how WLOC has been overlooked in general and emphasized the value of considering how the trait can alter employee responses to environmental factors, a call to which we respond.

By examining how newcomers may differentially respond to organizational efforts to facilitate their work adjustment, job embeddedness, and subsequent retention, we contribute to the literature in two important ways. First, although individual differences as main effects are shown to predict newcomer outcomes (Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg, 2003; Kim et al., 2009; Thompson, 2005; Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), less is known whether such

differences may *condition* reactions to tactics. For example, Gruman et al. (2006) examined interactions with proactive behaviors, whereas Jones (1986) focused on self-efficacy (which is now considered more situation specific as opposed to an enduring trait, Bandura, [1997]). Our focus on the moderating role of WLOC reflects the perspective that newcomers do not merely wait for organizations to formally socialize them, but rather appreciate that some actively make efforts to aid in their own adjustment (Kim et al., 2009; Morrison, 2002). It is also consistent with the primary distinction drawn in tactics research—the locus of socialization efforts. While institutionalized tactics entail more external (i.e., organizational) control over the timing, phases, structure, and social context of newcomer experiences, individualized tactics assume more internal (i.e., individual) influence over these factors.

Second, along with work adjustment and job embeddedness as mediators, we also assess actual turnover, allowing us to examine how WLOC and socialization tactics interact to predict downstream stay-or-leave decisions. Objective metrics are still rare in socialization research—a meta-analysis included just four primary studies linking socialization tactics or work adjustment indicators to turnover (Bauer et al., 2007), a shortcoming that continues with most work relying on intentions as a proxy for behavior (Rubenstein et al., 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The difficulty of being a newcomer becomes apparent from meta-analytic evidence suggesting that those employed one year or less are among the most likely demographic category to quit (Griffeth and Hom, 2001). The socialization literature provides two explanations for the higher turnover propensity. The first concerns whether newcomers can overcome key hurdles regarding their work and social adjustment. Newcomers enter organizations with relatively unstructured cognitive maps of their new environment, yet must quickly learn what their role

consists of and how to perform core tasks and develop relationships with colleagues. These work adjustment indicators are operationalized as *role clarity* (i.e., understanding what tasks will be performed in the job), *task mastery* (i.e., confidence in the role and how to perform job tasks), and *social integration* (i.e., developed relationships with peers and acceptance into the work group; Bauer et al., 2007; Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg, 2003). Newcomers who report better adjustment are more likely to feel successful and positive about their jobs and are less likely to quit (Bauer et al., 2007).

The second explanation for higher turnover propensity concerns a more recent retention perspective: job embeddedness (Allen, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2001). Job embeddedness describes being enmeshed in an organization to the extent of being stuck and thus less likely to quit (Allen, 2006). For example, having specialized knowledge, extensive links to people, and benefits one would give up upon leaving are among embedding factors that contribute to staying. Compared to work adjustment, job embeddedness is less affective in nature, describing a person's structural attachment to, or immersion in, an organization (Zhang et al., 2012). Job embeddedness has also been conceptually and empirically distinguished from social integration and organizational commitment (Crossley et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2001). In this study, we examine three work adjustment indicators—role clarity, work mastery, social integration—and job embeddedness as antecedents to turnover because both are prominent in extant theoretical accounts of newcomer socialization and retention processes.

Organizations can reduce newcomers' turnover propensity by socialization tactics that facilitate their work adjustment and job embeddedness (Allen, 2006; Saks and Ashforth, 1997). Jones (1986) organized prior conceptualizations of tactics (i.e., Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) along a continuum ranging from individualized to institutionalized approaches. Individualized

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tactics are ambiguous, unstructured, and sporadic, where newcomers are given less detail or direction and are encouraged to craft their roles in whatever way they feel is best—what Jones (1986) termed an “innovative role orientation”. In contrast, institutionalized tactics are formal, structured, and sequential; they more explicitly provide role information—what Jones (1986) termed a “custodial role orientation”. For this reason, the general empirical consensus is that institutionalized tactics are associated with more favorable newcomer outcomes (Bauer et al., 2007). As Jones summarized (1986: 266), “institutionalized socialization tactics are likely to present newcomers with less problems in searching for situational consistency and mediating personal adjustment”.

We use uncertainty management theory to support our contention that newcomers prefer predictability in their environment and use available information and interpersonal connections to make inferences about uncertain situations (Takeuchi et al., 2012). At its core, the theory maintains that uncertainty is aversive. Under uncertain situations, individuals have a limited understanding of their environment and their place in it (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Hogg, 2000). Newcomers face uncertainty that should be reduced for them to become well-adjusted (Saks and Ashforth, 1997). For instance, Schein (1971) described the “reality shock” of being a newcomer, and Van Maanen (1977: 16) described organizational entry as being “thrust from a state of certainty to uncertainty”. The theory also suggests that institutionalized socialization tactics determine the success of socialization outcomes by reducing newcomer uncertainty. Mignerey et al., (1995) described how such tactics offer structure that makes information and feedback more readily available to newcomers through formal supervisory or peer communication channels, and Fang et al. (2011: 135) explained that institutionalized tactics “reduce newcomer uncertainty by shaping how information is disseminated as well as what sources of information and social

resources are given”. In other words, newcomers reduce uncertainty by acquiring information that helps them to do their job, attaining a better understanding of their role, and building interpersonal relations that increase feelings of belongingness as an insider.

Personality also determines how individuals handle uncertain circumstances (Ashford and Black, 1996; Tidwell and Sias, 2005), and whether they see themselves or organizational sources as responsible for increasing predictability in their work environment (Wang et al., 2010). WLOC is a useful trait for understanding how newcomers may differentially react to an individualized versus institutionalized socialization approach, and can play an important role in determining the success of an organization’s socialization efforts. Internals hold strong agency beliefs about their own actions contributing to their work success, and interpret environmental reinforcements as contingent upon their own efforts. Internals also exert greater effort at work, seek information more actively, exhibit greater learning (Phares, 1976), and are more motivated to use personal abilities to try and understand and influence their surroundings (Boone et al., 2005; Spector and O’Connell, 1994). In contrast, externals believe they are controlled largely by their work environments, and interpret environmental reinforcements as contingent upon outside factors. Externals also tend to have lower self-esteem, and perceive limited ability to manage life outcomes and control their success (Spector, 1982). It is worth noting that research also shows that WLOC better predicts work-specific outcomes than does general LOC (Wang et al., 2010).

Hypotheses

Starting by hypothesizing that tactics will differentially predict turnover for internals versus externals, we expect that externals will be less apt to quit under institutionalized tactics but more likely to quit under individualized tactics. All newcomers have uncertainty to reduce, yet externals stand by for guidance regarding what their role is, how they should perform tasks,

and whom they should know. Externals should thus benefit (as shown by their lower turnover) from institutionalized tactics that provide newcomers with role/task support along with insider connections (Bauer et al., 2007; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). At the same time, externals can flounder under individualized tactics that presuppose (or even demand) newcomers to figure things out for themselves. Indeed, Lonergan and Maher (2000) found that externals with high job autonomy were more likely to procrastinate at work (Janssen and Carton [1999] found similar effects in an academic setting). This absence of a catalyst to reduce uncertainty—either from oneself or the organization—will likely lead to anxiety and frustration for externals, which we expect will translate into a higher likelihood of quitting (Wanous, 1980).

Internals believe that they should reduce their own uncertainty rather than waiting for help from the organization (Phares, 1976). If not adjusting well, they will likely attribute this to their own lack of effort. Indeed, Lonergan and Maher (2000) found that internals with high job autonomy reported the least procrastination, and Spector (1982) argued that internals' decisions to quit will be largely based on their own volition rather than organizational efforts to reduce uncertainty (or lack thereof). Thus, we expect that internals' turnover will be less influenced by either form of socialization tactics. Although institutionalized tactics give internals a structured onboarding plan, internals are likely to consider making such socialization efforts themselves, or at least accept their responsibility in the socialization process. Thus, the reduced turnover effect of institutionalized tactics should be less marked for internals. Whereas individualized tactics do less to reduce uncertainty, we expect internals to be less frustrated by this situation because they have higher work initiative and feel more personally empowered (Ng et al., 2006).

Hypothesis 1: WLOC will moderate the relationship between socialization tactics and voluntary turnover, such that the negative relationship between institutionalized (versus individualized)

socialization tactics and voluntary turnover will be weaker for newcomers with an internal WLOC, but stronger for newcomers with an external WLOC.

Models of socialization (e.g., Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 2007) position turnover as a distal outcome of socialization tactics mediated by proximal work adjustment indicators and job embeddedness. We envision that regardless of whether their WLOC is more internal or external, newcomers who develop higher work adjustment (role clarity, work mastery, social integration), and embeddedness will be less likely to quit. Yet, in terms of the first-stage effects in our model, we expect WLOC to moderate the relationship between socialization tactics and these mediators. We acknowledge that some evidence suggests internals are more likely to act on intentions to quit that may arise as a function of poor adjustment (Allen et al., 2005). However, this has little to do with reactions to socialization tactics. Instead, we focus on our contention that newcomers' adjustment and embeddedness may vary as a function of how much they rely on the organization to facilitate their socialization, as captured by WLOC.

Role Clarity. WLOC determines the extent to which newcomers believe uncertainty management (related to their adjustment) is something for which they are responsible. In terms of learning role requirements, externals are more likely to rely on outside sources for direction and are less likely to engage in self-training that allows them get clear about role expectations (Blau, 1993). They should thus feel less role clarity under individualized than institutionalized socialization, because the latter reduces their uncertainty through clear task information and availability of insiders responsible for supporting their transition from outsider to insider (Bauer and Green, 1998). In contrast, because internals are more likely to engage in greater self-training and prefer to acquire information to solve problems independently (Phares, 1976; Spector, 1982), we expect to see a weaker relationship between socialization tactics and role clarity for them. It

is possible for internals to attain some benefit from institutionalized tactics because they provide all newcomers with more direct information about role clarity. Yet, because internals rely mainly on their own agency—which might not align with the organization’s best practices—we do not expect internals to achieve role clarity as readily as externals under institutionalized tactics, who are more prone to follow the organization’s strategy (Biondo and Macdonald, 1971; Hjelle and Clouser, 1970).

Work Mastery. The sequential learning and formal practices that institutionalized tactics provide, giving newcomers more discretion over the pace of instruction, are further expected to facilitate work mastery, particularly for externals. When tactics are too individualized, externals can find themselves in a discouraging situation where they lack the organizational resources to learn to accomplish work tasks and the self-sufficiency to procure resources that would improve their knowledge of the job. For internals, work mastery perceptions are likely to be higher under individualized socialization practices since they enable them to be proactive and self-sufficient in pursuing information pertaining to knowledge of their job, although such newcomers might not be significantly affected under an institutionalized socialization approach.

Social Integration. Any investigation of socialization must account for how newcomers acclimate to the interpersonal environment at work (Korte and Lin, 2013). For instance, Bauer et al. (2007: 709) argued that institutionalized tactics, “provid[ing] mentoring and positive feedback to newcomers” improve social integration, and Fang et al. (2011) suggested that such tactics give newcomers greater access to social capital. In contrast, individualized tactics do not offer social opportunities and supply fewer means to learn proper workplace conduct. Because internals exert greater personal control over their environments, we expect that they should be more inclined to self-initiate interactions with workplace insiders, regardless of whether the organization arranges

such opportunities (Ng and Feldman, 2011; Ng et al., 2006). Thus, internals' social integration should be less influenced by choice of socialization tactic. In contrast, externals exhibit greater situational conformity (Spector, 1982), adhering closely to social reinforcements to guide behavior. Externals exposed to institutionalized tactics will likely heed what they learn with earnest and feel more socially accepted in doing so. But under individualized tactics, which give newcomers limited counsel about idiosyncratic group norms, social structure, etc., externals will be more likely to struggle socially, for they are not predisposed to inquire about such information from insiders.

Hypothesis 2: *WLOC will moderate the indirect relationships between institutionalized (versus individualized) socialization tactics and voluntary turnover through newcomer work adjustment (i.e., role clarity, work mastery, social integration); in the first-stage mediation, the positive relationships between institutionalized tactics and work adjustment will be weaker for newcomers with an internal WLOC, but stronger for newcomers with an external WLOC.*

Job Embeddedness. Socialization tactics can affect newcomer retention by increasing their job embeddedness (Allen, 2006; Allen and Shanock, 2013). We focus here on on-the-job embeddedness because socialization tactics emphasize *work* adjustment and it is a stronger predictor of turnover than off-the-job embeddedness (Allen, 2006; Jiang et al., 2012). Given its increasing role in turnover theorizing, embeddedness serves as a useful bridge construct between socialization and turnover research. Studies also suggest it can be fostered during socialization to help retain newcomers (Allen, 2006; Allen and Shanock, 2013; Rubenstein et al., 2019).

Consistent with our adjustment mediators, we expect WLOC to moderate the impact of socialization tactics on newcomers' embeddedness and subsequent turnover. Although research suggests that embeddedness partially mediates the link between socialization tactics and turnover

(Allen, 2006; Allen and Shanock, 2013), it is still not clear how individual differences influence the reliance on certain tactics for enhancing embeddedness and inhibiting turnover. In line with our theorizing, we expect that internals will be less susceptible to socialization efforts aimed at increasing their embeddedness. Internals are more immune to behavioral change influences, such as those of institutionalized tactics (Spector, 1982), and in seeking to retain personal control over their environment, also may or may not work to embed themselves. In contrast, externals are apt to be more reliant on socialization tactics that influence their embeddedness. Because externals cede control to outside authorities to define their work experience, they should report greater embeddedness levels under institutionalized tactics, which provide newcomers with a uniform message about how to perform, insider role models, collective orientation activities, and a more thorough acculturation process (e.g., formal learning and practice to become competent in one's role, established routines, developed social networks), all of which enmesh newcomers into the organizational fold (Allen, 2006). Therefore, we hypothesize that more institutionalized (versus individualized) tactics will increase newcomers' embeddedness, but that this relationship will be more pronounced for externals. In turn, we expect higher embeddedness will reduce newcomers' likelihood of quitting (i.e., an overall negative mediation effect), but that such effects will be more pronounced for externals compared to internals.

***Hypothesis 3:** WLOC will moderate the indirect relationship between institutionalized (versus individualized) socialization tactics and voluntary turnover through newcomer job embeddedness; in the first-stage mediation, the positive relationship between institutionalized tactics and embeddedness will be weaker for newcomers with an internal WLOC, but stronger for newcomers with an external WLOC.*

Method

Sample and Procedure

We collected data through a research company from a diverse newcomer sample across job types and levels and from a range of organizations to ensure variance in socialization tactics. Specifically, we requested a Japanese research company—Rakuten Insight—to collect data from full-time employees who started to work on a permanent basis for privately-owned organizations in Japan two months ago or fewer, because such time periods have been identified as a critical point in the newcomer adjustment process (Bauer et. al., 2007). The research company informed us that 2,200 of approximately 300,000 people in their database fulfilled our screening criteria.

To mitigate concerns about common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), we collected data with four online surveys at four time points over 12 months; each survey spaced three months apart. We considered the 12-month period appropriate, as researchers often conceptualize socialization being completed within the first year (Bauer et al., 2007). The research company assured participants of confidentiality and that the data were collected only for research purposes. Participation was voluntary (respondents received small incentives—online shopping points) and all participants were made aware that their responses would not be linked to their employer or supervisors.

The research company sent all four surveys to 2,200 newcomers who met our screening criteria. At Time 1, we measured WLOC and eight control variables; age, gender, marital status, hierarchical rank, education, firm size, occupation, industry (1,430 people completed the survey; 65% initial response rate). At Time 2, we measured socialization tactics and one control variable, information seeking (1,071 people completed the survey). At Time 3, we measured role clarity, work mastery, social integration, and job embeddedness (954 people completed the survey). At Time 4, we measured voluntary turnover (737 people completed the survey; 34% overall

response rate). We listwise deleted respondents who did not complete all four surveys; the final sample contained 676 newcomers. We compared respondents who completed all surveys with those who dropped out early but did not find any significant differences in demographics (e.g., age, gender), WLOC, or job-related characteristics (e.g., work adjustment, job embeddedness, position, occupation, industry). We matched surveys using respondents' unique identification numbers, age, and gender, which were collected in all four surveys.

In our final sample, respondents averaged 39 years of age ($SD = 10.88$); 67% were male, 46% were married. The average size of their employing organizations was 3,955 ($SD = 23,645$); 30.62% worked in organizations of fewer than 50 employees. Respondents worked in diverse industries: construction (5.92%), finance, insurance, real estate (6.61%), healthcare (13.91%), manufacturing (12.72%), retail (4.44%), services (24.56%), transportation and communication (5.92%), and others (26.04%). Within industry there was broad occupational representation; administrative and managerial-level (9.47%), professional and engineering (33.73%), office (18.64%), sales (10.21%), service (10.21%), manufacturing (1.18%), transport and machine operation (2.37%), construction and mining (1.04%), carrying, cleaning, packaging, and related (1.18%), and others (11.98%).

Measures

Survey items were translated from English to Japanese using back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). To ensure face validity, a bilingual (English-Japanese) employee in the research company checked and approved the translated surveys. Unless stated otherwise, measures were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

Work locus of control was measured by a 16-item scale from Spector (1988). In the scale, lower scores represent a more external WLOC whereas higher scores represent a more

internal WLOC. A sample item is “A job is what you make of it.” ($\alpha = .84$, lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .83$)

Socialization tactics were measured with 30 items from Jones (1986), where higher scores refer to more institutionalized tactics and lower scores to more individualized tactics. Sample items include “In the last six months, I have been extensively involved with other new recruits in common, job related training activities” and “other newcomers have been instrumental in helping me to understand my job requirements.” ($\alpha = .96$, lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .95$)

Work adjustment was measured as role clarity, work mastery, and social integration. *Role clarity* was measured by a three-item, seven-point scale (1 = *seldom/never*, 7 = *very often*) from Jokisaari and Nurmi (2009). A sample question is “Do you know exactly what is expected of you at work?” ($\alpha = .85$, lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .84$) *Social integration* was measured by a four-item scale from Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller (2000). A sample item is “Your coworkers seem to accept you as one of them” ($\alpha = .94$, lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .93$). *Work mastery* was measured by a three-item scale from Jokisaari and Nurmi (2009). A sample question is “Are you content with the quality of work you do?” ($\alpha = .89$, lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .88$).

Job embeddedness was measured with the seven-item scale from Crossley et al. (2007). A sample item is “I feel tied to this organization” ($\alpha = .79$, lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .77$).

Voluntary turnover. Consistent with prior studies on turnover (e.g., Rubenstein et al., 2018), participants reported if they were still employed in the same organization. If participants had left the organization, they reported whether their turnover was voluntary or involuntary. Those who had left due to involuntary reasons were excluded from analyses to focus on volitional quit decisions. Voluntary turnover was coded “1” for leavers and “0” for stayers.

Control Variables. We controlled for information seeking given its relation to work adjustment and turnover (Bauer et al., 2007), and measured it with a six-item, seven-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *a few times a day*) from Morrison (1993). A sample item is “Think about the last three months at work. To gain information related to your work tasks, how frequently, in general, have you asked your direct supervisor?” ($\alpha = .91$; lower one-sided $CI_{95\%} = .90$). We controlled for newcomer gender and age because female and younger employees tend to change jobs more frequently (Griffeth and Hom, 2001). We controlled for marital status (1 = *married/live together*, 2 = *single*, 3 = *divorced*, 4 = *widowed*, 5 = *married but live separately*) and education level (1 = *middle school*, 2 = *high school*, 3 = *vocational school/two year university*, 4 = *Bachelor’s*, 5 = *Master’s/Ph.D.*) because single and more educated people tend to change jobs more frequently (Benson et al., 2004). We also controlled for hierarchical rank (1 = *staff*, 2 = *assistant manager*, 3 = *section manager*, 4 = *department manager*, 5 = *manager above department manager*) in the organization because people in higher positions tend to leave more often (Spence, 1973) and socialization tactics may vary at different levels (Bauer et al., 2007). We controlled for firm size by including a measure of the log number of employees. Last, we included occupation and industry dummy controls to show that although turnover patterns differ across occupations/industries, socialization tactics and WLOC can still influence turnover.

Results

We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to validate all multi-item scales. The full measurement model with all latent variables yielded acceptable fit indices (Hu and Bentler, 1999): Comparative Fit Index = .91, Tucker Lewis Index = .90, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation = .05, $df=1583$. We compared this baseline measurement model with several theoretically plausible alternative models. In the best competing model, we loaded three work

adjustment items onto a single latent factor. Given the relatively large sample size, we calculated the difference in approximate fit indices to compare model fit (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002). The results showed that our baseline model fit better than the best competing model: $\Delta\chi^2(9) = 1546.90, p < .001$. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables.

 INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Given our dichotomous outcome, we tested our conceptual model using the weighted least square mean and variance adjusted estimator in Mplus version 8. Given the complexity of our moderated mediation model, we incorporated the PROCESS macro (Model 7; Hayes, 2013) into structural equation modeling (SEM) with all control variables. The SEM results are reported in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that WLOC moderates the relationship between socialization tactics and voluntary turnover. As reported in Table 2, the results showed a significant positive interaction effect ($\beta = .11, p < .05$). To provide insight into this interaction pattern, we plotted relationships among socialization tactics, WLOC, and voluntary turnover (see Figure 2). Simple slope tests further show that the tactics-turnover relationship was negative ($\beta = -.15, p < .001$) for newcomers with an external WLOC (one *SD* below the mean), but was not significant ($\beta = -.03, p = .48$) for newcomers with an internal WLOC (one *SD* above the mean). These results lend support to Hypothesis 1. According to our calculation, the marginal means of predicted probability of voluntary turnover for newcomers with an external WLOC (one *SD* below the mean) under individualized socialization tactics is significantly reduced under institutionalized socialization tactics (Δ predicted probability = 0.78). The difference in probability of voluntary turnover for newcomers with an internal WLOC (one *SD* above the mean) under individualized

socializations versus institutionalized socialization tactics is much smaller (Δ predicted probability = 0.30) compared to those externals.

 INSERT TABLE 2 AND FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Hypotheses 2 and 3 proposed that WLOC moderates the first-stage indirect relationship between socialization tactics and voluntary turnover through work adjustment (social integration, work mastery, role clarity) and job embeddedness mediators. As shown in Table 2, WLOC significantly moderated the relationship between socialization tactics and social integration ($\beta = -.30, p < .05$), and the relationship between socialization tactics and job embeddedness ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$). Also shown in Table 2 (columns 7 and 9), social integration ($\beta = -.04, p < .001$) and job embeddedness ($\beta = -.06, p < .01$) transmitted the interaction between socialization tactics and WLOC predicting voluntary turnover. However, we did not observe significant mediation effects for work mastery ($\beta = -.02, p = .10$) or role clarity ($\beta = -.02, p = .16$). To understand the unique effects of each mediator, we also tested all work adjustment indicators and job embeddedness simultaneously in one model (Table 2, column 10). The results show that job embeddedness continued to transmit the interaction between socialization tactics and WLOC in predicting voluntary turnover ($\beta = -.05, p < .01$). However, the specific indirect effect of social integration was no longer significant.

We again plotted relationships at low and high levels of socialization tactics and WLOC. Shown in Figures 3a and 3b, for externals, socialization tactics had significant positive relations with social integration ($\beta = .51, p < .01$) and job embeddedness ($\beta = .54, p < .01$). For internals, the positive relationship between socialization tactics and social integration, and between tactics

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and embeddedness, were weaker (less positive). Specifically, internals' simple slopes predicting social integration ($\beta = .20, p = .07$) and job embeddedness ($\beta = .18, p = .08$) were not significant.

INSERT FIGURES 3A AND 3B ABOUT HERE

We estimated 95% confidence intervals for these indirect effects using the Monte Carlo simulation approach (Selig and Preacher, 2008) with 20,000 bootstrapped samples. As shown in Table 3, when WLOC was low/external ($-1 SD$), socialization tactics had significant, negative indirect effects on turnover via social integration ($\beta = -.02, p < .05$) and job embeddedness ($\beta = -.03, p < .01$). Yet, when WLOC was high/internal ($+1 SD$), the indirect effects via both social integration ($\beta = -.01, p = .12$) and job embeddedness ($\beta = -.01, p = .15$) were not significant. Taken together, results show that WLOC moderated the indirect socialization tactics \rightarrow social integration \rightarrow turnover and the indirect socialization tactics \rightarrow job embeddedness \rightarrow turnover paths. Meanwhile, the conditional indirect effects of socialization tactics on voluntary turnover through work mastery and role clarity were not significant.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

Although considerable efforts have been made to understand the newcomer adjustment process, the question of how individual differences influence the success of socialization tactics has remained largely unanswered. Prior research has been preoccupied with answering the question, "What are the best socialization tactics across newcomers?" In our opinion, a more appropriate question is, "For *whom* are certain socialization tactics more or less beneficial?" Answering this question allows for a more accurate understanding of onboarding employees who

are similarly new to the organization but differ in their dispositional makeup. By clarifying how WLOC moderates newcomer responses to socialization tactics in predicting their work adjustment, job embeddedness, and future voluntary turnover, we demonstrate that not all newcomers react to organizational socialization approaches in the same way, while more broadly responding to calls for research on newcomer onboarding as a critical context when individual differences matter to retention (Zimmerman et al., 2016). Because research linking socialization tactics with turnover is limited (Bauer et al., 2007), we contribute by ascertaining the underlying mechanisms through which these effects operate.

Theoretical Contributions

This study invokes uncertainty management theory to provide a more nuanced account of how socialization tactics influence newcomer work adjustment, job embeddedness, and turnover. We acknowledge that these proximal and distal outcomes are influenced not only by the task or social environment crafted by the organization, but also by the employee him/herself and person-by-situation interactions (Meyer et al., 2010). Although individualized tactics might be preferred when organizations seek to promote change and adaptation (Cable and Parsons, 2001) or when newcomers are encouraged to innovate (Jones, 1986), few studies have questioned whether such a homogeneous approach to socialization is best. Uncertainty management theory suggests that all newcomers desire to reduce uncertainty and make sense of their work environments so as to make events and interactions more predictable (Berger, 1979; Heider, 1958), and that uncertainty is reduced through information acquisition, for example, from supervisors or peers (Mignerey et al., 1995; Saks and Ashforth, 1997).

The findings also highlight that newcomers enter organizations with varying personal control-outcome expectancies (i.e., based on their WLOC) regarding who should be primarily

responsible for this information acquisition—themselves or their organization—and exposing the behavioral consequences if these expectations do not align with the organization’s socialization approach. Newcomers with an internal WLOC are motivated to reduce uncertainty on their own, using their abilities to preemptively understand and influence their surroundings (Boone et al., 2005). For this reason, we found that internals were less influenced by either socialization approach, despite institutionalized tactics arguably representing more of a “strong” situation (Mischel, 1977), in which clearly prescribed behavioral standards exist that can result in similar outcomes across all newcomers (Fang et al., 2011). In contrast, externals, who prefer to cede control of their uncertainty reduction to the organization, benefitted more from structured institutionalized tactics, but fared worse under unstructured individualized tactics—a “weak” situation—in terms of their social integration, embeddedness, and reduced future turnover.

We also add to socialization research by testing specific explanatory mechanisms—work adjustment and job embeddedness—that link socialization tactics to turnover. This study serves as a useful bridge connecting our understanding of newcomer entry processes with that of early exit decisions. Although we are not the first to suggest these constructs as mediators (*cf.* Allen, 2006; Allen and Shanock, 2013; Bauer et al., 2007), by simultaneously modeling them together, we obtained a more integrative picture of how socialization tactics function to reduce quitting. The most tenable explanation borne from our findings suggest that tactics increase newcomer job embeddedness, or their structural immersion within the organization, and that this entrenchment makes resignation more difficult.

Interestingly, our significant interaction effects occurred in predicting social integration and job embeddedness, but not role clarity or work mastery. Thus, the interaction among WLOC and type of socialization tactics appear more relevant to the domain of developing connections

and relationships than to understanding one's role or mastering core job tasks. This suggests newcomers may rely more heavily on organizational socialization efforts than on their own WLOC in terms of learning to perform the work itself, but that WLOC's importance manifests more strongly when it comes to getting socially involved in the workplace. This finding is consistent with a recent turn to focusing on relationships in turnover research (Jo and Ellingson, 2019), and with prior work suggesting it is the specific tactics involving positive social feedback and interactions with organizational insiders that matter most for newcomer retention (Allen, 2006). We extend these lines of inquiry by demonstrating individual differences in how newcomers respond to organizational efforts to help them assimilate into the new organization.

Practical Implications

Our findings have implications can benefit newcomers and inform practice, especially in light of current labor trends. Employee tenures have declined in recent decades, and projected to continue declining especially for younger workers (Meister, 2012). Although workers currently stay at their jobs for a median of 4.2 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018), the expected tenure for younger employees is about half that, with Millennials projected to hold 15-20 jobs over the course of their working lives (Meister, 2012). This implies that workers will take on new jobs at an increasing rate, which has implications for how organizations structure onboarding programs, as well as what newcomers might expect for their own adjustment efforts.

Socialization presents significant costs (on average US\$3,000 per newcomer; de Haaff, 2019). Institutionalized tactics are often more expensive than individualized tactics; they require greater investment in planning and coordinating newcomer activities, and thereby impose greater time demands on managers and coworkers. Our results suggest that institutionalized socialization are greater value to some newcomers (externals) compared to others (internals). Considering the

projected increase in the volume and frequency of employee socialization, one source of savings is to consider differences in the extent to which newcomers need formal guidance and support, and pre-screening and customizing socialization efforts for those who require more or less (Ramajaran and Reed, 2020). In some professions, such as sales, where newcomers with similar characteristics may gravitate and stay in the organization through attraction-selection-attrition processes (Schneider, 1987), a unified socialization strategy can boost performance and reduce implementation costs. Yet, more diverse organizations should be cautious to employ such a one-size-fits-all practice. Pre-hire assessments combined with ongoing monitoring of socialization effectiveness help stakeholders to understand each new hire and their socialization needs or preferences.

Joining an organization is a time when newcomers experience uncertainty and build cognitive maps of the organization and their place within it to reduce that uncertainty (Allen, 2006). Newcomers who understand their own behavioral tendencies may be better equipped to build structure and thereby adjust more efficiently by managing certain ambiguities before they start work. For instance, our findings suggest that internals are more adept at controlling their circumstances irrespective of the situation in which they find themselves. Internals who also have the meta-cognitive awareness regarding such proclivities would be in better position to construct these cognitive maps and reduce their uncertainty. Further, internals' knowledge that they can adjust successfully regardless of their organization's socialization approach may be an empowering source of confidence. Externals can also benefit from such awareness by knowing that they should take full advantage of offered structured onboarding, but also that they should not assume help will always be provided, especially under an individualized system.

Limitation and Future Research Directions

We focused on WLOC, while acknowledging that other individual differences likely qualify the relationship between socialization tactics and turnover. For instance, LOC is one aspect of the broader core self-evaluation (CSE) meta-trait (Judge et al., 2002). Future research could thus consider other CSE dimensions as moderators. Constructs that correspond to specific motivational orientations, such as communion- and status-striving (Zhan et al., 2015) may also hold promise for which areas newcomers concentrate uncertainty reduction efforts. Identifying the appropriate intervention emphasis over time for particular newcomers can aid in better understanding how newcomers manage uncertainty at different socialization stages.

Because of our focus on individual responses to organizational tactics, we treated newcomer information seeking as a control. However, the activities of the organization and the individual are both important pathways for understanding newcomer adjustment, and WLOC would certainly be theoretically expected to influence how actively or passively newcomers seek to acquire information in their quest to reduce uncertainty. In our data, more internally oriented newcomers were more likely to report seeking information, although the correlation is perhaps surprisingly modest ($r = .08$). Given that our significant results were concentrated on building connections, perhaps future work considering how individual differences and information seeking influence the more task-oriented elements of newcomer adjustment would be fruitful.

We acknowledge that the individualized versus institutionalized socialization dichotomy is not the only way to frame tactics. Future research could complement our results by unpacking distinct tactics tied to specific organizational goals, such as facilitating person-organization fit or innovation (Kim et al., 2005). It is also possible that some newcomers who react positively to fixed tactics (i.e., an institutionalized tactic involving a clear timetable of activities) may at the

same time find disjunctive tactics (i.e., an individualized tactic involving no offered insider help) to also be attractive (or vice-versa).

Because the measurement scales used in newcomer socialization research have been mainly developed in Western countries (Bauer et al., 2007), concerns may arise about cross-cultural validity or measurement invariance of our scales. Although prior studies show high reliability and validity for WLOC (Spector et al., 2002) and job embeddedness (Allen et al., 2016) in Japan, and for Jones' (1986) socialization tactics scale in South Korea (Kim et al., 2005), we cannot know for certainty that the meaning of the constructs or the survey items generalizes across different cultural contexts. For example, there might be context-specific enmeshing opportunities that would affect perceptions of being embedded in an organizational context, or cultural differences in how individuals interpret questions about luck, fate, or external control. While our results do not suggest serious departures from expectations, future work that is able to assess measurement invariance across samples of newcomers from multiple contexts would be valuable for ensuring that respondents are interpreting survey measures as intended.

Finally, our measures, though separated across four time points, were collected through self-reports. Although newcomers are arguably most knowledgeable of their own socialization experience (Chan, 2009), concerns remain about CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This temporal separation also means that some people who responded at Time 1 likely quit before completing all surveys, and we are unable to differentiate these people from those who stopped responding for other reasons. Thus, we have lost some information about early turnover decisions. Future research that collects more fine-grained temporal data (e.g. experience sampling) might enable more nuanced investigation of these processes.

Conclusion

This study challenges the prevailing assumption that all newcomers react similarly to a given organizational socialization approach. Because turnover is often costly, along with data suggesting individuals in the labor force may be changing jobs at an increasing rate in the near future, this highlights the need for scholars and practitioners to better understand how to retain talent—especially not long after hire. In particular, our results emphasize WLOC as an important individual difference that may condition how newcomers react to socialization tactics. Whereas our results showed internals were less sensitive to either tactical approach in terms of their work adjustment, job embeddedness, and later turnover likelihood, externals fared significantly better under institutionalized relative to individualized tactics. Taken together, our findings speak to the practical value of screening new hires on this trait to better understand their unique needs and thereby assist in their adjustment.

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Table 1. Means (*M*), Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Voluntary Turnover	0.18	0.39												
2 Socialization Tactics ^a	3.83	0.63	-0.16											
3 Work Locus of Control ^b	4.15	0.51	-0.05	0.12										
4 Work Mastery	3.85	1.51	-0.07	0.19	0.18									
5 Role Clarity	4.44	1.58	-0.08	0.14	0.24	0.66								
6 Social Integration	4.43	1.40	-0.16	0.18	0.23	0.60	0.53							
7 Job Embeddedness	3.79	1.09	-0.18	0.19	0.13	0.39	0.34	0.51						
8 Information Seeking	4.53	1.90	-0.10	0.30	0.08	0.02	0.18	0.16	0.09					
9 Age	38.53	10.88	0.01	-0.21	0.05	0.21	0.23	0.08	0.02	-0.19				
10 Gender ^c	0.33	0.47	0.07	0.07	-0.05	-0.15	-0.15	-0.02	-0.04	0.11	-0.26			
11 Firm Size	5.19	2.39	-0.09	0.21	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.03	-0.02	0.19	-0.12	-0.05		
12 Education	3.70	0.87	-0.07	0.06	0.00	0.08	0.05	0.05	-0.04	0.11	-0.16	-0.09	0.16	
13 Hierarchical Rank	1.53	1.09	0.01	-0.13	0.12	0.24	0.19	0.14	0.14	-0.17	0.34	-0.17	-0.07	0.08

Notes. N = 676. ^a Higher scores refer to more institutionalized socialization tactics, whereas lower scores refer to more individualized socialization tactics. ^b Higher scores refer to more internal work locus of control, whereas lower scores refer to more external work locus of control. ^c Gender, 0 = male, 1 = female. For correlations above .075, $p < .05$; for correlations above .099, $p < .01$; for correlations above .132, $p < .001$.

Table 2. Summary of Results of Structural Equation Modeling.

	Dependent Variable									
	(1) Voluntary turnover	(2) Work Mastery	(3) Voluntary turnover ^c	(4) Role Clarity	(5) Voluntary turnover ^c	(6) Social Integration	(7) Voluntary turnover ^c	(8) Job Embeddedness	(9) Voluntary turnover ^c	(10) Voluntary turnover ^c
<i>Control variables</i>										
Information Seeking	-0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.17*** (0.03)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.10 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.06* (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)	0.02** (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Gender	0.06 (0.03)	-0.23 (0.13)	0.06 (0.03)	-0.30* (0.13)	0.06 (0.03)	0.07 (0.12)	0.06 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.08)	0.05 (0.03)	0.06 (0.03)
Firm Size	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Education	-0.02 (0.02)	0.12 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.06 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.07 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Hierarchical Rank	0.00 (0.01)	0.23*** (0.06)	0.01 (0.01)	0.16* (0.07)	0.01 (0.01)	0.18** (0.06)	0.01 (0.01)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
<i>Independent variable</i>										
Socialization Tactics ^a	-0.56* (0.22)	0.89 (0.60)		0.58 (0.67)		1.61** (0.61)		1.82** (0.55)		
<i>Moderator</i>										
Work Locus of Control ^b	-0.44* (0.20)	0.90 (0.57)		0.76 (0.62)		1.54** (0.55)		1.48** (0.50)		
Socialization Tactics X Work Locus of Control	0.11* (0.05)	-0.14 (0.15)		-0.06 (0.15)		-0.30* (0.14)		-0.35** (0.13)		
<i>Mediators</i>										
Work Mastery			-0.02 (0.01)							0.01 (0.01)
Role Clarity					-0.02 (0.01)					0.01 (0.02)
Social Integration							-0.04*** (0.01)			-0.03 (0.02)
Job Embeddedness									-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)

Notes. N = 676. ^aHigher scores refer to more institutionalized socialization tactics, whereas lower scores refer to more individualized socialization tactics. ^bHigher scores refer to more internal work locus of control, whereas lower scores refer to more external work locus of control. ^cThe first-stage interaction effect (socialization tactics X internal locus of control) is controlled in the model. All models included dummies of marital status, occupation, and industry. Two-tailed test.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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Table 3. Conditional Indirect Effects at Low and High Levels of Work Locus of Control for Socialization Tactics ^a

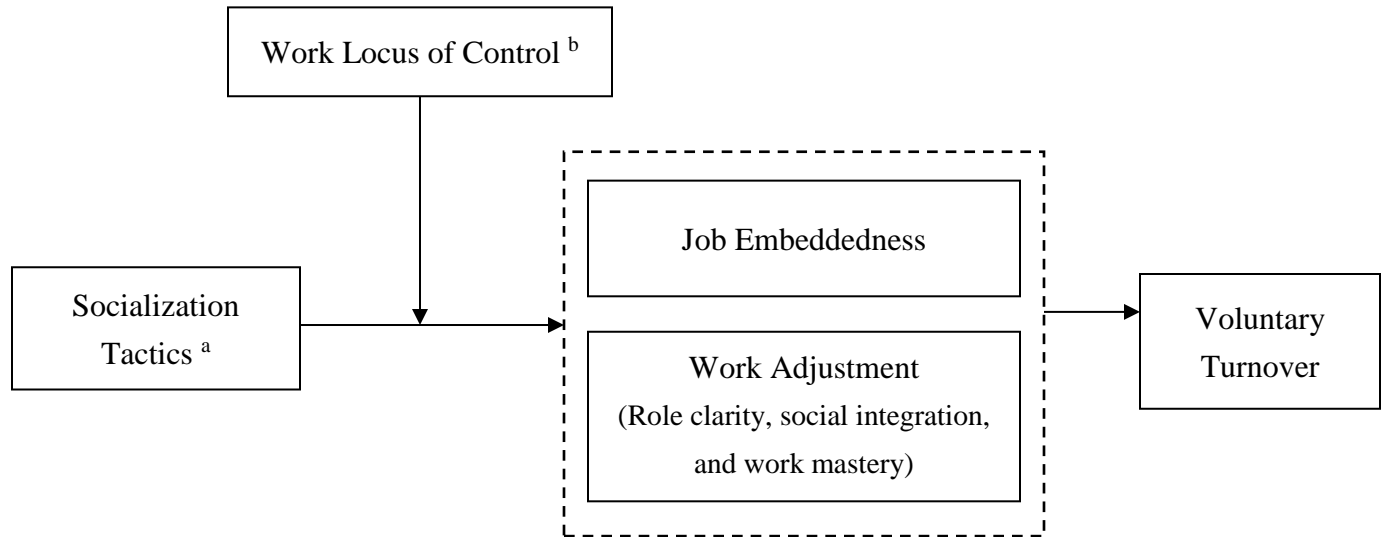
	Work locus of control ^b	Conditional indirect effect	Bootstrapped SE	Two-Tailed p-value	95% C.I.
Work Mastery	-1 SD (Low)	-0.01	0.01	0.20	[-0.02, 0.00]
	+1 SD (High)	0.00	0.00	0.30	[-0.01, 0.00]
Role Clarity	-1 SD (Low)	-0.01	0.01	0.25	[-0.02, 0.00]
	+1 SD (High)	-0.01	0.01	0.21	[-0.02, 0.00]
Social Integration	-1 SD (Low)	-0.02*	0.01	0.01	[-0.03, -0.01]
	+1 SD (High)	-0.01	0.01	0.14	[-0.02, 0.00]
Job Embeddedness	-1 SD (Low)	-0.03**	0.01	0.00	[-0.05, -0.02]
	+1 SD (High)	-0.01	0.01	0.17	[-0.02, 0.00]

Notes. N = 676. ^a Higher scores refer to more institutionalized socialization tactics, whereas lower scores refer to more individualized socialization tactics. ^b Higher scores refer to more internal work locus of control, whereas lower scores refer to more external work locus of control. Conditional indirect effects were estimated by incorporating Hayes' (2013) PROCESS approach (Model 7) into structural equation modeling; Results are based on 20,000 bootstrapped samples.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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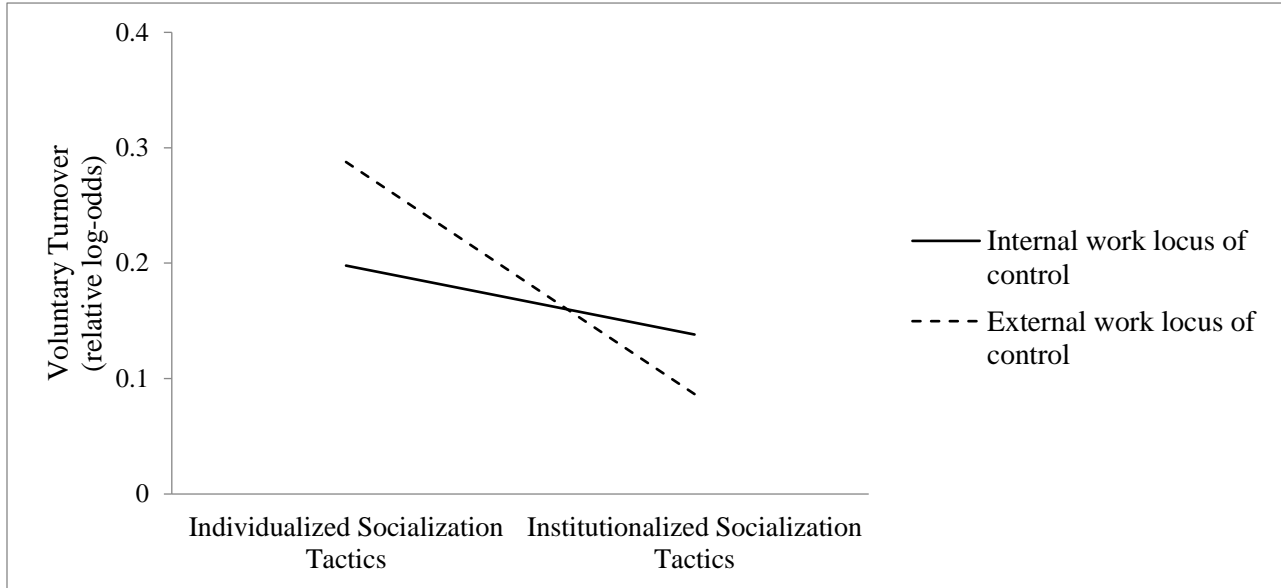
Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Note. ^a Higher scores of socialization tactics refer to more institutionalized socialization tactics, whereas lower scores refer to more individualized socialization tactics. ^b Higher scores refer to more internal work locus of control, whereas lower scores refer to more external work locus of control.

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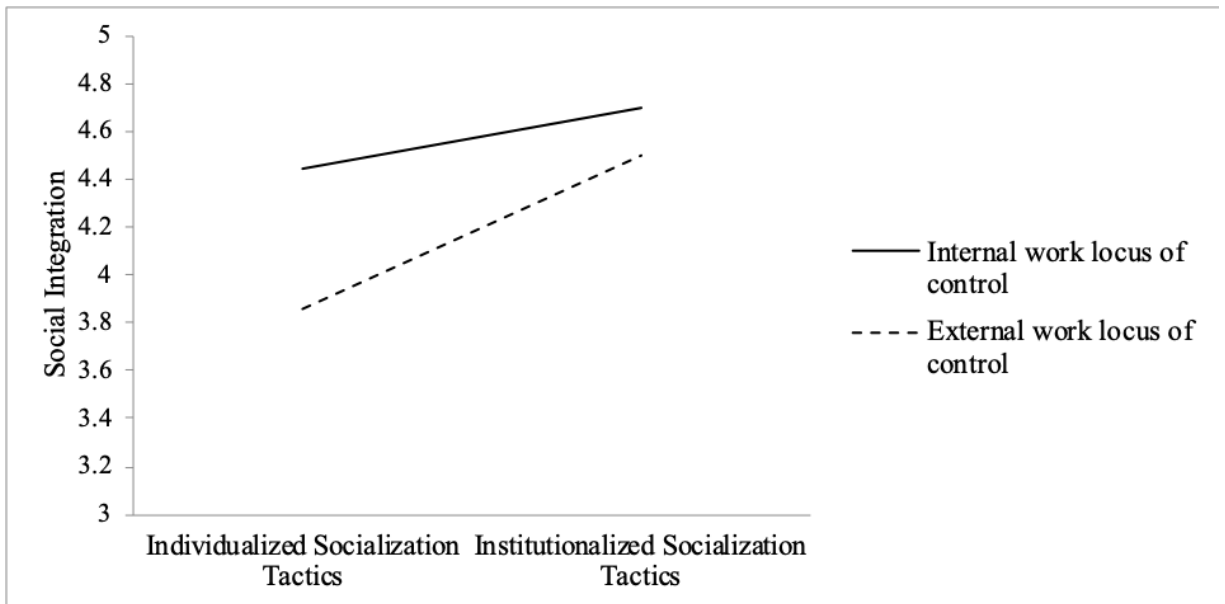
Figure 2. Interaction between socialization tactics and work locus of control predicting voluntary turnover (N = 676)



Note. Internal versus external locus of control and institutionalized versus individualized socialization tactics represent one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively.

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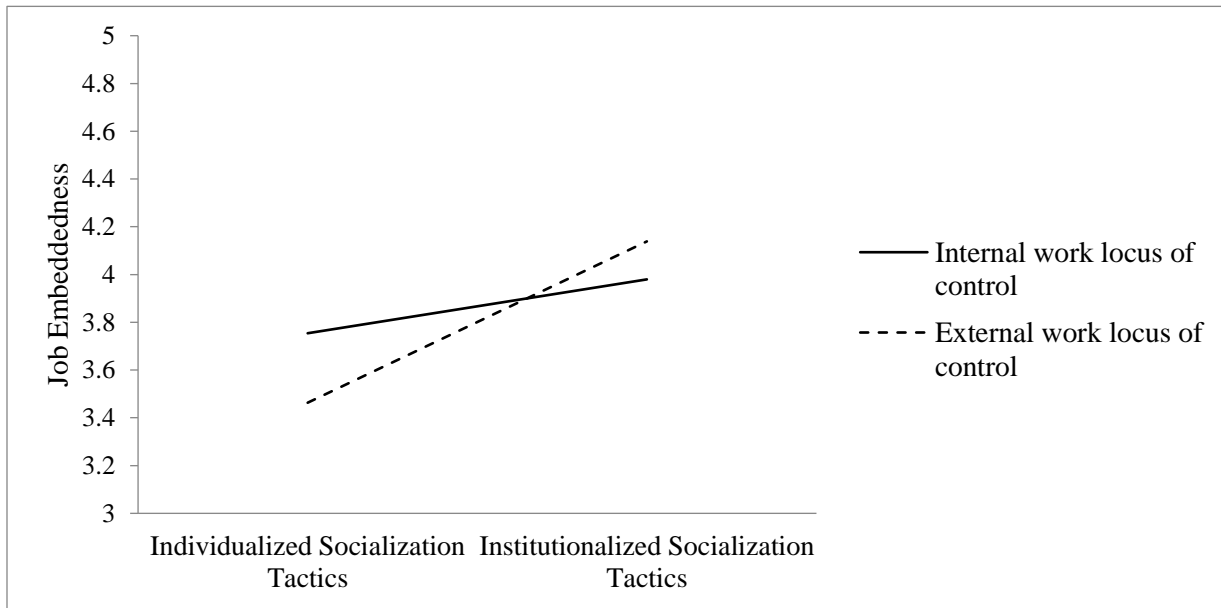
Figure 3a. Interaction between socialization tactics and work locus of control predicting social integration (N = 676)



Note. Internal versus external locus of control and institutionalized versus individualized socialization tactics represent one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively.

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Figure 3b. Interaction between socialization tactics and work locus of control predicting job embeddedness (N = 676)



Note. Internal versus external locus of control and institutionalized versus individualized socialization tactics represent one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively.