

University of Groningen

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*Published in:*  
Group Processes & Intergroup Relations

*DOI:*  
[10.1177/1368430216638534](https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430216638534)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Kane, A. A., & Rink, F. (2016). When and how groups utilize dissenting newcomer knowledge: Newcomers' future prospects condition the effect of language-based identity strategies. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 19(5), 591-607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430216638534>

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# When and how groups utilize dissenting newcomer knowledge: Newcomers' future prospects condition the effect of language-based identity strategies

Group Processes & Intergroup Relations

2016, Vol. 19(5) 591–607

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DOI: 10.1177/1368430216638534

gpir.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

Two experiments suggest that newcomers' structural role (permanent vs. temporary appointment) in the groups they enter conditions the extent to which their use of language-based identity strategies (integrating vs. differentiating) influences groups' willingness to accept them and utilize their dissenting task knowledge. For newcomers with *permanent* future prospects, the use of integrating pronouns leads to greater acceptance than the use of differentiating pronouns, and newcomer acceptance is in turn a key mediator of groups' willingness to utilize their knowledge. For newcomers with *temporary* future prospects, however, the use of integrating pronouns (vs. differentiating pronouns) does not positively influence their acceptance, nor does newcomer acceptance determine the willingness of groups to utilize their knowledge. The theory supported by these studies advances group socialization literature by elucidating when and how groups are receptive to dissenting newcomers.

## Keywords

deviance in groups, group receptivity to newcomers, group roles, group socialization, knowledge utilization, social acceptance, temporary and nonstandard workers

Paper received 14 April 2015; revised version accepted 8 February 2016.

A large body of research demonstrates that work group effectiveness depends on the extent to which members possess sufficient expertise and knowledge to execute group tasks (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Argote, Ingram, Levine, & Moreland, 2000; Bonner & Baumann, 2012). For this reason, scholars generally believe that newcomers, who represent a source of unique, task-relevant knowledge, may bring added value to groups (Levine & Choi, 2011; Levine, Choi, & Moreland, 2003). Studies on this topic have

indeed identified a few task conditions under which groups effectively utilize newcomer knowledge, even when newcomers' propositions

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deviate from established work practices. For example, groups with a history of subpar performance, reduced performance expectations, or low task commitment, and groups for whom the merits of newcomer knowledge are demonstrably apparent, tend to learn from dissenting newcomers by utilizing their unique knowledge (Choi & Levine, 2004; Hansen & Levine, 2009; Kane, 2010; Ziller & Behringer, 1960).

Nonetheless, a review of 50 years of psychological and management research on group receptivity to newcomers revealed that, on balance, utilization of newcomer knowledge is relatively uncommon (Rink, Kane, Ellemers, & van Der Veegt, 2013). Research suggests that groups are often not willing to utilize the unique task resources embedded within their newest member, even when these resources can help achieve common task goals, because of the way groups regard newcomers (Kane & Rink, 2015; see also Cimino & Delton, 2010; Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005; Moreland, 1985; Rink & Ellemers, 2015). Despite the innovative potential of newcomers, groups tend to view them as socially distinct (e.g., Hornsey, Grice, Jetten, Paulsen, & Callan, 2007; Moreland, 1985), and therefore first need to socially accept newcomers before they are willing to utilize their dissenting knowledge.

Kane and Rink (2015) investigated whether newcomers themselves can actively address these affiliative group concerns and increase their own acceptance, as this should in turn enhance the utilization of their dissenting knowledge. Emphasizing the new group identity with plural pronouns (we, our) did in fact yield greater acceptance and in turn knowledge utilization than emphasizing one's personal identity with singular pronouns (I, you). So, intentionally or unintentionally, the two styles indeed communicated newcomers' interest in *integrating* into the group or an interest in *differentiating* from it. This finding suggests that groups are unwilling to utilize unique knowledge from newcomers unless they address their groups' affiliative concerns and achieve social acceptance.

It remains an open question, however, whether newcomer acceptance is *always* needed in order

for groups to utilize newcomer knowledge. After all, today's workforce is on the move, with few employees spending careers in one work group or organizational setting (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Management literature shows that due to employee transfers, the use of temporary contracts, and reorganizations, newcomers currently enter work groups in an array of different structural roles (Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007). Whereas some newcomers are immediately appointed to a permanent position within groups, others are only invited to offer temporary assistance (Rink & Ellemers, 2009). These fundamentally different newcomer future prospects are likely to influence groups' affiliative concerns in relation to newcomers. We therefore propose a contingency theory on the importance of using an integrating language strategy and gaining social acceptance for newcomers in order for groups to utilize their dissenting knowledge. After all, when newcomers occupy fundamentally different structural roles with distinct future prospects (permanent vs. temporary), it is likely that the importance of how they are regarded by groups varies as a function of these future prospects.

The current research advances scientific understanding of the utilization of dissenting newcomer knowledge because we examine *when* groups are most likely to experience affiliative concerns in relation to newcomers. In doing so, we identify a newcomer's structural role as a key newcomer feature that determines whether dissenting newcomers need to be vigilant about how they present themselves in order to gain social acceptance. Our central prediction is that groups have greater affiliative needs when confronted with permanent newcomers than with temporary newcomers, and thus rely more heavily on newcomer acceptance to determine willingness to utilize newcomer knowledge. Permanent newcomers should therefore yield greater acceptance, and hence more knowledge utilization, when they use an integrating language strategy rather than a differentiating language strategy. For temporary newcomers, however, the effects of the two language-based identity strategies should be less pronounced.

## Theoretical Framework

Based on their review of psychology and management literature, Rink et al. (2013) proposed that the utilization of unique newcomer knowledge and newcomer acceptance are two conceptually distinct components of group receptivity to newcomers. Indeed, one can in principle occur independently from the other. But, on its own, knowledge utilization is not sufficient for groups to fully benefit from their newest additions, given that the degree to which group members mutually accept one another is so critical for sustained and effective collaboration (see Rink et al., 2013, p. 271). This argument fits with group learning literature, which proposes that groups must be *willing* to utilize unique newcomer knowledge (Argote & Kane, 2003; Bunderson, van Der Vegt, & Sparrowe, 2014). This is important because new knowledge can be costly, as it tends to cause disruptions (at least initially), and the merits of its adoption for group functioning are often not immediately clear, particularly in complex work situations (Kane, 2010). Decades ago, Hollander (1958) already highlighted that group receptivity to a dissenting member is proportional to this member's idiosyncratic credits, a form of positive impressions. It follows directly that group acceptance of dissenting newcomers reflects such impressions and thus will be critical for the utilization of their knowledge (for an expanded discussion, see Kane & Rink, 2015, p. 93).

The notion that newcomer acceptance has a role in group utilization of dissenting newcomer knowledge can also be derived from central tenets of the classic group socialization model (Levine & Moreland, 1994; Moreland & Levine, 1982). According to this model, merely being categorized as a newcomer causes groups to see a person as socially distinct and tends to dampen performance expectations (Moreland, 1985), even when newcomers express a normative view that groups appreciate (Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010). So by virtue of their distinct experiences outside of the group, newcomers have few idiosyncratic credits (Cimino & Delton, 2010) and are seen as deviants that tend to

challenge group norms (see also Ellemers & Jetten, 2013; Rink & Ellemers, 2015). As a result, when a newcomer represents a potential source of unique knowledge, it becomes a priority for groups to discern the extent to which this person is a committed group member (Levine & Moreland, 1994, 1999; Moreland & Levine, 2001).

### *Newcomers' Language Strategies*

Given that social deliberations tend to explain whether groups decide to utilize or reject newcomer knowledge, Kane and Rink (2015) proposed that newcomers themselves, as active agents, can increase their own social acceptance and in turn knowledge utilization by using a language-based identity strategy with plural pronouns (i.e., we, ours) that signals their willingness to *integrate* into the group and take on the group's identity. This was indeed what they found. By contrast, the use of a language-based identity strategy with singular pronouns (i.e., I, my, you) in fact signaled newcomers' interest in *differentiating* from the group's identity and therefore reduced newcomers' chances of being accepted.

These findings highlight that newcomers can modify initial group impressions and signal affiliation through the way they interact with groups. It is, however, valuable to consider whether newcomers continuously need to monitor how they come across in the groups they enter, and thus need to regulate their own behavior unremittingly. This is a relevant question because it is not common for newcomers to use an integrating language strategy. People generally employ singular pronouns to express themselves (Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003), especially when they are in a marginal group position (Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & McKimmie, 2003). It is natural for people to protect themselves by placing greater importance on their personal rather than their group identity (Rink & Ellemers, 2011). Accordingly, newcomers may not want to emphasize an aspirational group identity that is not yet their own, and may even feel incapable of doing so, for example, in a less than welcoming group (Kane & Rink, 2015).

In addition, contemporary work organizations are increasingly flexible in nature, resulting in great variation in the structural roles that newcomers occupy within the groups they enter (Ashford et al., 2007; Vough, Broschak, & Northcraft, 2005). Newcomers may gain a permanent position with the long-term prospect of becoming a full group member, or they may be placed in a temporary position with limited future prospects (Rink & Ellemers, 2009). Theory suggests that groups' reliance on social deliberations in determining whether or not to utilize newcomer knowledge may very well depend on the future prospects that come with such structural roles. Insofar as this is the case, the advantages of using an integrating language strategy may also hinge on this key newcomer characteristic.

### *Newcomers' Future Prospects*

Many newcomers are currently still offered permanent contracts that are not restricted to a specific work period, but organizations increasingly use restructurings and temporary employee transfers as a means to enhance employee efficiency (Ashford et al., 2007). Moreover, many contemporary organizations strategically and deliberately attract newcomers for a limited amount of time to maintain workforce flexibility (Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006). Management literature shows that the influx of such temporary newcomers can worsen the quality of relations among employees because it highlights that the organization's work environment is volatile (Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003). Organizations can, however, mitigate this effect by demonstrating that they value job security and are still committed to their existing staff (George, 2003). In addition, scholars have argued that temporary newcomers should raise few social concerns in work groups as long as they are highly competent and demonstrate their task value (Vough et al., 2005). This last argument implies that groups may actually care little about social acceptance in the case of temporary newcomers, as they do not have to develop long-lasting collaborations with these persons.

In a group experiment, Rink and Ellemers (2009) indeed found suggestive evidence for the idea that groups were more relationship-focused toward a permanent newcomer than toward a temporary newcomer. In accordance with the group socialization model (Levine & Moreland, 1994; Moreland & Levine, 1982), groups made it a priority to discern whether their newest member would fit in well in the group when this person had permanent future prospects. As a result, groups were then more concerned with establishing newcomer acceptance than with utilizing the newcomer's unique knowledge. Yet in the presence of newcomers with temporary future prospects, groups were less occupied with the question of whether or not the newcomer could pass as a full group member. Groups then became task-focused and thus utilized the unique knowledge of temporary newcomers, in spite of not accepting them as full group members. In other words, groups seem to have far fewer affiliative concerns in relation to newcomers when their tenure is expected to be short-lived rather than extending into the foreseeable future. From these findings, we infer that newcomer acceptance is not always a prerequisite for the utilization of newcomer knowledge, as this relationship may hinge on the future prospects of the newcomer in the group.

Given the previous reasoning, a newcomer's structural role should also determine how important it is for newcomers to use the integrating language strategy (vs. the more commonly used differentiating language strategy). As groups are relationally concerned when a newcomer joins them permanently, it can be expected that groups will only utilize this newcomer's unique knowledge when he or she fulfills the requirements of full group membership (i.e., can be fully accepted). So, under these circumstances, groups will be looking for signals that this new member wants to integrate into the group and take on the group's identity. Therefore, the newcomer will benefit from using the integrating language strategy (as opposed to the differentiating language strategy). But because groups are more task oriented when a newcomer joins them only temporarily, it can be expected that groups will not

expect this newcomer to act like a full group member, nor will they consider newcomer acceptance to be an important prerequisite for the utilization of this person's knowledge. This means that under these circumstances, groups are less attuned to newcomer behaviors, making it less important whether or not newcomers go out of their way to signal affiliation with the group with the integrating language strategy.

In conclusion, we expect that using the integrating language strategy (vs. the differentiating language strategy) will have more pronounced effects on newcomer acceptance for newcomers with future prospects in a group than for newcomers who merely have temporary prospects. In the former case, establishing newcomer acceptance should precondition a group's willingness to utilize their unique knowledge. We do not, however, expect that the integrating language strategy will have a strong effect on the extent to which groups are willing to accept temporary newcomers, and, importantly, it is unlikely that the degree to which they are accepted will impact the willingness of groups to utilize their knowledge. Our formal moderated mediation hypothesis is

Hypothesis 1. The indirect effect of language-based identity strategies on knowledge utilization through newcomer acceptance will be conditional on newcomers' future prospects, such that it will be stronger for permanently appointed than for temporarily appointed newcomers.

## General Method

We examined our conceptual model with a scenario experiment and a behavioral group experiment. In both studies a newcomer with related work experience replaced a departing group member. The newcomer joined the group as either a permanent member or as a temporary member. After working for some time with the group, the newcomer suggested the group adopt a different, better work routine using either integrating pronouns or differentiating pronouns.

Experiment 1 employed a scenario methodology because it was well suited for assessing whether existing group members vary in their affiliative concerns in relation to permanent and temporary newcomers, and hence display different psychological responses toward their use of the two language strategies (integrating vs. differentiating), in terms of newcomer acceptance, and their *willingness* to utilize newcomer knowledge. Experiment 2 employed an interactive group design because it was well suited for demonstrating that the psychological processes established in Experiment 1 translate into behavioral knowledge utilization.

## Experiment 1

### *Methodology*

*Design and participants.* This scenario experiment employed a 2 x 2 factorial design in which newcomers' future prospects (temporary, permanent) were crossed with newcomers' use of a language-based identity strategy (differentiating, integrating).

In return for course credit, undergraduate students from a private American university ( $N = 118$ ; age  $M = 19.9$ ,  $SD = 1.3$ ; 45% male; 2% freshmen, 58% sophomores, 30% juniors, and 9% seniors; 89% Caucasian, 3% Asian, and 2% African American) participated in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: (a) permanent newcomers using the integrating pronoun strategy,  $n = 31$ ; (b) permanent newcomers using the differentiating pronoun strategy,  $n = 30$ ; (c) temporary newcomers using the integrating pronoun strategy,  $n = 29$ ; or (d) temporary newcomers using the differentiating pronoun strategy,  $n = 28$ .

*Group task and newcomer introduction.* Participants were presented with an online scenario vignette that placed them in the role of a group member responding to a newcomer. They read that they were part of a project group in DynaOrg Inc., an organization that specializes in the development of new medical devices. Next, participants read that their

work group had experienced a change in membership (i.e., “just like real teams and organizations, your team experienced a change in membership”).

*Manipulation of newcomers' future prospects.* Participants read that the newcomer was joining their group on either a permanent or a temporary basis. In particular, the permanent/temporary text was:

The newcomer is joining your team *permanently* [temporarily]. This means that the newcomer will work with your team on a *permanent* [temporary] basis. The newcomer will remain a member of your team for *the foreseeable future* [some time before leaving].

To reinforce as well as assess the effectiveness of this manipulation, participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) the extent to which they thought that the newcomer “will remain a member of the team for the foreseeable future,” (b) “has joined the team on a permanent basis,” (c) “will leave the team shortly” (reversed), and (d) “has only joined the team on a temporary basis” (reversed). The four items formed a reliable scale, Cronbach's alpha = .93. Confirming the effectiveness of the manipulation, this measure of newcomer permanence was significantly higher in the permanent prospects' condition,  $M = 6.55$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ , than in the temporary prospects' condition,  $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ,  $F(1, 114) = 265.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .70$ .

*Manipulation of language-based identity strategies.* Participants read that within a few days of working with their group, the newcomer came up with a new idea, which he/she suggested using the integrating pronoun strategy or the differentiating pronoun strategy. In particular, the integrating/differentiating strategy was:

*We* [I] have been doing things differently. *We* [You] should do things another way around here. *We* [I] have been trained differently, but this new way will work really well for *us* [you]. It will probably really help *us* [you] to use this better work routine. Should *we* [I] go over it?

*Newcomer acceptance.* Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *do not agree at all*, 7 = *agree completely*) with the following Kane and Rink (2015) items: (a) “I will readily accept the newcomer,” (b) “I want the newcomer to become an established member of the team,” (c) “I will be pleased to have the newcomer become an established member of the team,” (d) “I think that the newcomer will become a full part of the team soon,” and (e) “I think the newcomer will integrate into the team easily.” The five items formed a reliable scale, Cronbach's alpha = .91.

*Knowledge utilization.* To measure knowledge utilization, participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) the extent to which they, as established group members, would (a) “try out the work routine the newcomer suggested,” (b) “utilize the work routine the newcomer suggested,” (c) “adopt the work routine the newcomer suggested,” and (d) “incorporate the work routine the newcomer suggested” (Kane & Rink, 2015). The four items formed a reliable scale, Cronbach's alpha = .93.

Although newcomer acceptance and knowledge utilization were significantly correlated ( $r = .31$ ,  $p = .001$ ), a confirmatory principal components analysis with oblimin rotation showed that these measures are represented as separate factors (eigenvalues = 4.67 and 2.41, respectively), together explaining 78.6% of variance. As shown in Table 1, the newcomer acceptance items had high loadings on the first factor and low cross-loading on the second factor, whereas the knowledge utilization items had high loadings on the second factor and low cross-loadings on the first factor.<sup>1</sup> This pattern of distinct factor loadings and near-zero cross-loadings confirms the distinctness of the newcomer acceptance and knowledge utilization measures.

## Results

We predicted that the mediation of the effect of language-based identity strategies on knowledge utilization by newcomer acceptance would be

**Table 1.** Experiment 1 factor loadings with oblimin rotation of Newcomer Acceptance Scale and Knowledge Utilization Scale.

Scale	Factor 1	Factor 2
Newcomer Acceptance Scale		
I will readily accept the newcomer.	<b>.80</b>	.10
I want the newcomer to become an established member of the team.	<b>.95</b>	-.16
I will be pleased to have the newcomer as an established member of the team.	<b>.95</b>	-.07
I think that the newcomer will become a full part of the team soon.	<b>.84</b>	.04
I think the newcomer will integrate into the team easily.	<b>.75</b>	.17
Knowledge Utilization Scale		
To what extent do you think that you as an established team member will try out the work routine the newcomer suggested?	-.04	<b>.90</b>
To what extent do you think that you as an established team member will utilize the work routine the newcomer suggested?	-.01	<b>.96</b>
To what extent do you think that you as an established team member will adopt the work routine the newcomer suggested?	.04	<b>.91</b>
To what extent do you think that you as an established team member will incorporate the work routine the newcomer suggested?	.03	<b>.85</b>

Note. Factor loadings > .70 are in boldface.

conditional on newcomers' future prospects, such that it would be stronger for permanently appointed than for temporarily appointed newcomers. To assess this hypothesized moderated mediation, we ran two regression analyses, shown in Table 2, and used bootstrapping to calculate confidence limits around an estimate of the indirect mediation effects at each level of the future prospects' moderator (Hayes, 2013; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007).<sup>2</sup>

As shown in Table 2, Model 1, the effect of identity strategy on newcomer acceptance was conditional on newcomers' future prospects,  $B = 2.09$ ,  $SE = .45$ ,  $t(114) = 4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . Groups displayed more social acceptance of permanent newcomers using the integrating rather than the differentiating strategy,  $M_s = 5.67$  and  $4.49$ ,  $SD_s = 1.01$  and  $1.37$ ; whereas groups displayed less social acceptance of temporary newcomers using the integrating rather than the differentiating strategy,  $M_s = 3.09$  and  $3.99$ ,  $SD = 1.12$  and  $1.36$ . As expected, groups were significantly more socially accepting of permanent newcomers using the integrating strategy than of any other type of newcomer,  $t(114) = 13.13$ ,  $p = .000$ .<sup>3</sup>

As shown in Table 2, Model 2, the proposed mediator, newcomer acceptance, significantly influenced the dependent variable, knowledge utilization,  $B = .27$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $t(112) = 3.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , but as hypothesized, this effect was conditional on newcomers' future prospects,  $B = .47$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ,  $t(112) = 3.02$ ,  $p = .003$ . As shown in Figure 1, newcomer acceptance was only associated with greater knowledge utilization in the case of permanent newcomers; it was unrelated to knowledge utilization in the case of temporary newcomers.

Using bootstrapping with 10,000 resamples (Hayes, 2013), we calculated a bias-corrected confidence interval around the indirect effect for the newcomer acceptance mediation at each level of newcomers' future prospects.<sup>4</sup> For permanently appointed newcomers, the indirect effect was significant,  $B = .60$ ,  $SE = 0.21$ , 95% CI [0.26, 1.12], as the confidence interval around this effect does not include zero. Note that the magnitude of the coefficient (.60) can be interpreted as the mean difference in knowledge utilization (on a 7-point scale) attributable to permanent newcomers using the integrating strategy compared to the differentiating strategy through newcomer acceptance



**Table 2.** Experiment 1 moderated mediation regression analyses.

	Model 1	Model 2
Model	NA = $B_0 + IS + FP + IS \times FP$	KU = $B_0 + IS + FP + IS \times FP + NA + NA \times FP$
Intercept	-0.03 (.11)	4.18*** (.11)
Identity strategy	0.14 (.22)	0.42* (.20)
Future prospects	1.54*** (.22)	-0.12 (.22)
Identity Strategy x Future Prospects	2.09*** (.45)	-0.47 (.41)
Newcomer acceptance		0.27*** (.08)
Newcomer Acceptance x Future Prospects		0.47** (.16)
	$R^2 = .38,$ $F(3, 114) = 23.39, p < .001$	$R^2 = .25$ $F(5, 112) = 7.54, p < .001$

*Note.*  $B_0$  = intercept; IS = identity strategy; FP = future prospects; NA = newcomer acceptance. To ease interpretation, dichotomous variables are coded with main effect parameterization (i.e., temporary: -.05; permanent: 0.5; differentiating: -.05; integrating: .05) and newcomer acceptance is mean centered (see, Hayes, 2013, pp. 276–279, 288). \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

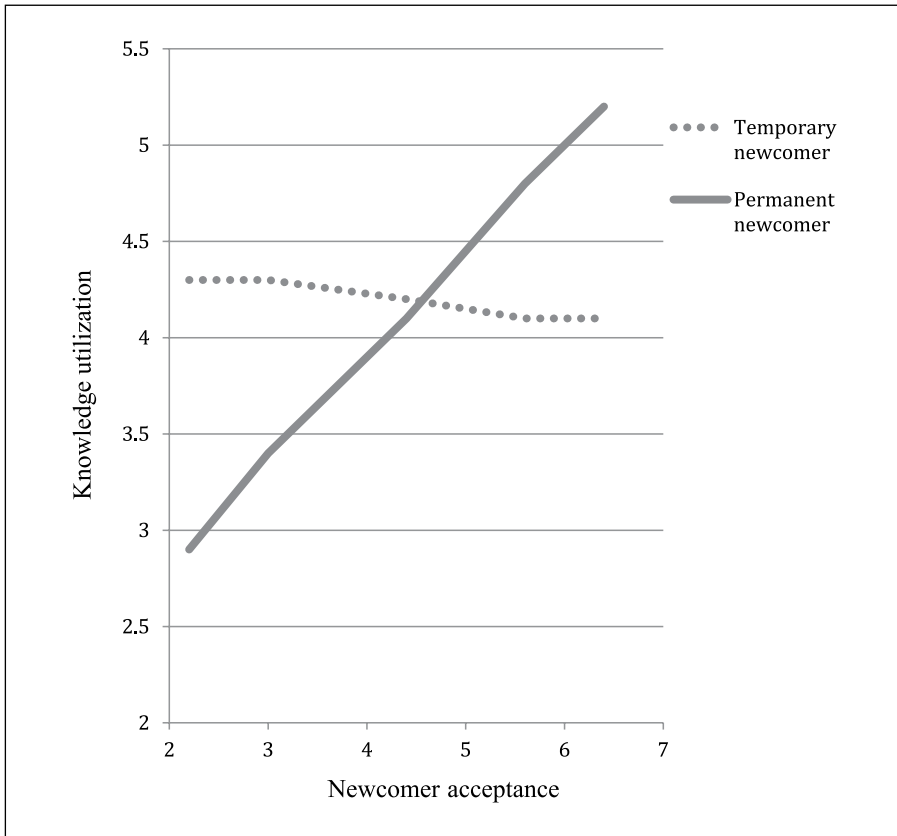
(Hayes, 2009). By contrast for temporarily appointed newcomers the indirect effect was not significant,  $B = -.03$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ , 95% CI  $[-0.32, 0.22]$ , as the confidence interval spans zero. Taken together, these results provide support for the moderated mediation hypothesis.<sup>5</sup>

### Discussion

Results confirm our predicted moderated mediation model. The indirect effect of language-based identity strategies on knowledge utilization through newcomer acceptance was conditional on newcomers' future prospects. Only permanent newcomers were more readily accepted when they used the integrating language strategy that emphasized the new group's identity. Surprisingly, temporary newcomers were even more readily accepted when they used the differentiating strategy that more accurately reflected their separation from the group. This effect was not anticipated, but, as predicted, it supports our general argument that newcomers' future prospects determine when groups rely on social

psychological considerations for determining their willingness to utilize dissenting newcomer knowledge. When newcomers joined permanently, groups were very attuned to social considerations, and as such needed to accept these newcomers first before displaying a willingness to utilize their knowledge. By contrast, when newcomers joined temporarily, group willingness to utilize knowledge did not depend on newcomer acceptance, meaning that groups were as receptive to unique knowledge from newcomers using the integrating strategy as the differentiating strategy.

Experiment 1 yielded promising results with respect to the psychological process through which existing group members respond to dissenting newcomers. However, it remains to be tested whether the psychological willingness of existing group members to explore newcomers' better work routines will indeed translate into behavioral knowledge utilization, which comes with disruption and requires changes in established work routines. With a group task that is highly interdependent and involves the



**Figure 1.** Experiment 1: Knowledge utilization as a function of newcomer acceptance and future prospects. Plots derived from estimates calculated at the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles in the newcomer acceptance sample distribution, 2.20, 3.00, 4.40, 5.60, and 6.40, respectively (for details, see Hayes, 2013, p. 238).

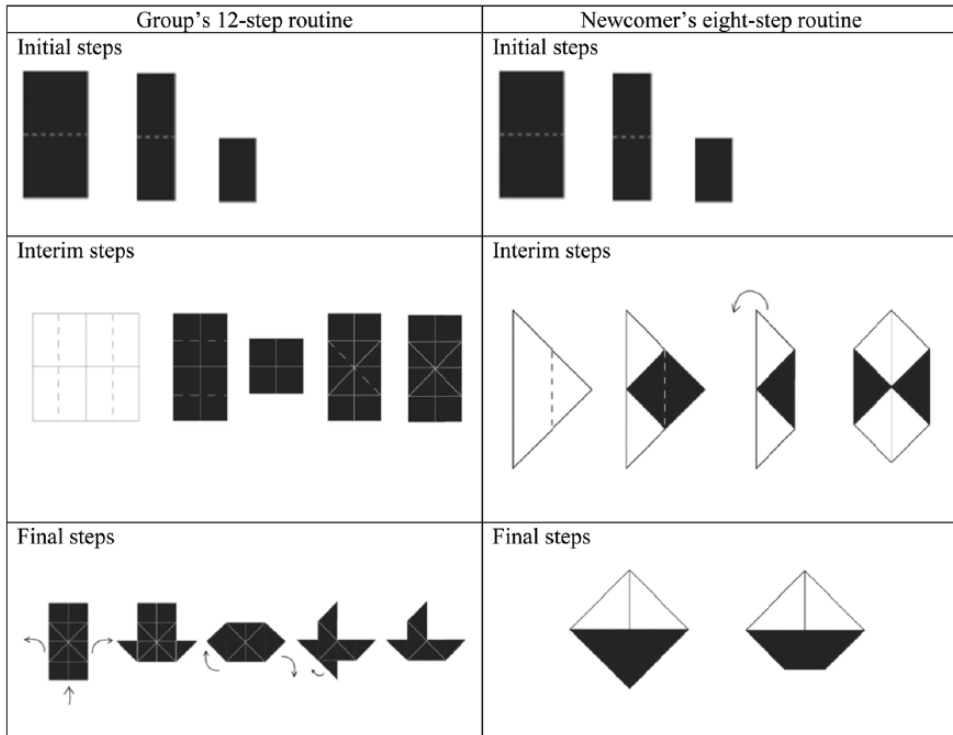
establishment of work routines, Experiment 2 is well suited to address this question.

## Experiment 2

### Method

We employed a 2 x 2 factorial design in which newcomers' future prospects in the group (temporarily appointed, permanently appointed) were crossed with newcomers' use of a language-based identity strategy (differentiating, integrating). In return for course credit, undergraduate students from a private American university ( $N = 183$ ; age  $M = 20.07$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ; 49% male; 50% sophomores, 39% juniors, and 7% seniors; 78%

Caucasian, 7% Asian, 2% Hispanic, and 6% African American) participated in 61 three-person groups. Groups were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions: (a) permanent newcomer using the integrating pronoun strategy,  $n = 16$ ; (b) permanent newcomer using the differentiating pronoun strategy,  $n = 16$ ; (c) temporary newcomer using the integrating pronoun strategy,  $n = 15$ ; or (d) temporary newcomer using the differentiating pronoun strategy,  $n = 14$ . The newcomer was always a female confederate blind to the hypotheses, who was trained to manipulate the randomly assigned identity strategy condition by delivering three lines of script (see the Manipulation of Language-Based Identity Strategies section in what follows).<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 2.** Experiment 2: Production routines taught to groups and proposed by newcomers. After the third rectangle of the initial steps is folded, the paper is unfolded to begin the interim steps. The interim and final steps of the group's routine require more folds than do the interim and final steps of the newcomer's routine. The figure is from "How Newcomers Influence Group Utilization of Their Knowledge: Integrating Versus Differentiating Strategies," by A. A. Kane and F. Rink, 2015, *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 19, p. 96. Copyright 2015 by APA. Reprinted with permission. Newcomer's steps are from "Unlocking Knowledge Transfer Potential: Knowledge Demonstrability and Superordinate Social Identity," by A. A. Kane, 2010, *Organization Science*, 21, p. 658. Copyright 2010 by INFORMS. Adapted with permission.

*Group task and newcomer introduction.* Participants worked in interdependent, three-person groups. Groups produced origami paper sailboats during five 4-minute production trials, three of which occurred before newcomer entry (Kane, 2010; Kane et al., 2005; Kane & Rink, 2015). The three group members introduced themselves, created a group name, and practiced the task. The task practice was thorough, and consisted of two segments lasting approximately 20 minutes each. During the first segment, participants learned to use a 12-step routine for making origami sailboats (see Figure 2). During the second segment, groups produced sailboats for three trials using a sequential production line

with one member responsible for the initial steps of the routine, a second for the interim steps, and a third for the final steps (see Figure 2). The experimenter revealed these randomly assigned steps to participants just before they began working in this sequential production line. A review of video recordings suggests that participants understood the task and were engaged in producing as a group.

*Newcomer entry.* Before the start of the fourth production trial, participants learned that just like in real organizations, their group would experience a membership change. Participants were reminded that other groups were working on the

same task in adjacent rooms. An existing group member, the initial assembler, departed their group for the remainder of the experiment. A newcomer, purportedly from one of the other groups, replaced the departing member and assumed the departing member's initial assembler role in the reconfigured group.

*Manipulation of newcomers' future prospects.* In the permanent newcomer condition, group members learned that the newcomer was joining the group permanently, and would work with them for the remaining two production trials. In the temporary newcomer condition, group members learned that the newcomer was joining the group temporarily, and would work with them for two production trials, departing before a sixth and final trial. To keep the design comparable across conditions, after the newcomer departed, the experimenter cancelled what would have been an additional production trial for groups in the temporary condition (for similar procedures, see Rink & Ellemers, 2009).

*Manipulation of language-based identity strategies.* Newcomers suggested that the group adopt a better work routine using either the integrating pronoun strategy or the differentiating pronoun strategy.<sup>7</sup> The specific language for the integrating/differentiating strategy was: "Oh, *we* [I] have been trained differently. *We* [You] should use this better routine—it also meets *our* [your] specifications. Should *we* [I] go over it?"

*Knowledge utilization.* This behavioral measure reflected whether groups utilized the newcomer's work routine. Coding was straightforward because groups displayed a willingness to utilize newcomers' unique knowledge by replacing their established work routine with the newcomer's routine (for a comparison of the routines, see Figure 2).

## Results

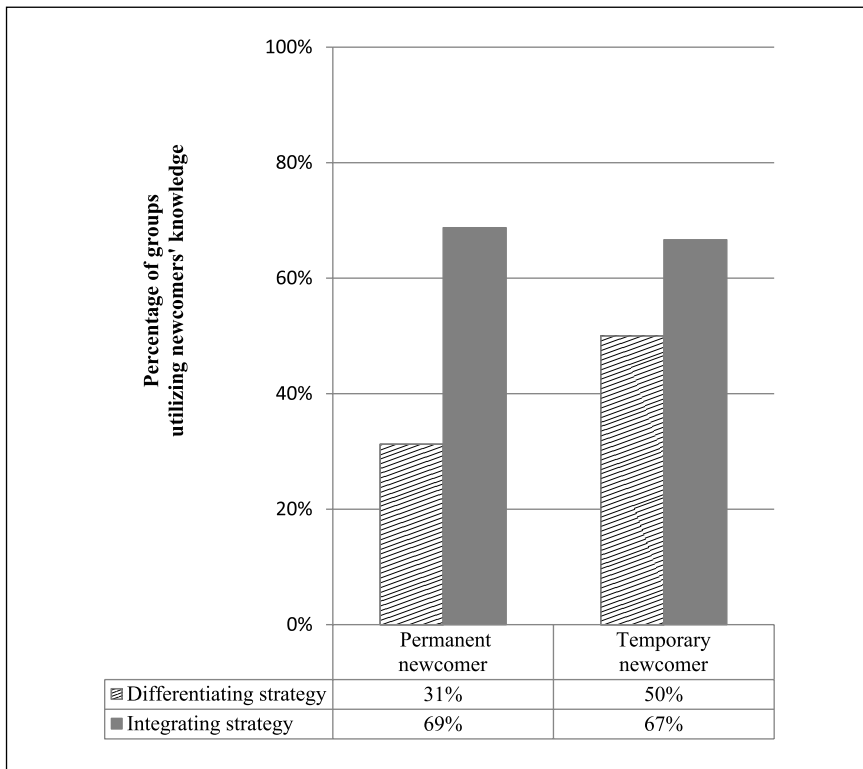
Of the 61 groups, 54.1% utilized newcomers' unique knowledge. As shown in Figure 3,

knowledge utilization occurred as a function of newcomers' language-based identity strategy,  $X^2(1) = 4.73, p = .03$ . A Cochran's test of conditional independence indicates that the effect of identity strategy is conditional on the newcomers' future prospects,  $X^2(1) = 4.71, p = .03$ .

Group willingness to utilize the knowledge of *permanent* newcomers depended on the identity strategy that they used,  $X^2(1) = 4.50, p = .03$ . When the newcomer joined permanently, the occurrence of knowledge utilization was significantly greater in the integrating strategy condition, 69%, than in the differentiating condition, 31%. This difference in the percentage of knowledge utilization due to use of the language-based identity strategies was large, 38%, and significant, 95% CI [0.03, 0.62]. By contrast, groups displayed a strong willingness to utilize the knowledge of *temporary* newcomers that did not significantly depend on the identity strategy that they used,  $X^2(1) = .83, p = .36$ . When the newcomer joined temporarily, the occurrence of knowledge utilization was high in both the integrating strategy condition, 67%, and in the differentiating strategy condition, 50%. Here, the difference in the percentage of knowledge utilization due to the use of the language-based identity strategies was smaller, 17%, and not significant, 95% CI [-0.17, 0.46].

## Discussion

In this interactive group experiment, we observed that newcomers' structural role (permanent vs. temporary) and their use of language-based identity strategies (integrating vs. differentiating) affected behavioral knowledge utilization, which required groups to actually change their established work routines. Although it was not possible to assess psychological newcomer acceptance in this study design (assessing it after knowledge utilization would introduce reversed causality problems, and assessing it beforehand would interrupt the group discussions and create demand effects; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991), the results varied in a pattern consistent with the psychological responses underlying our hypothesis



**Figure 3.** Percentage of groups in Experiment 2 that utilized the newcomers' dissenting knowledge as a function of the identity strategy newcomers used and the newcomers' future prospects in the group.

and found in Experiment 1. Newcomers who joined groups permanently benefitted significantly from using the integrating language strategy (as opposed to the differentiating strategy), as the former strategy caused more than twice as many groups to utilize their knowledge than the latter strategy. By contrast, newcomers who joined groups only temporarily did not benefit significantly from using the integrating strategy, as groups were relatively willing to utilize their knowledge regardless of how they presented themselves. Interestingly though, it bears some practical relevance that for them too, the integrating strategy did lead to greater knowledge utilization than the differentiating strategy. Nonetheless, this effect was smaller for temporary than for permanent newcomers, suggesting that groups were indeed less attuned to social considerations when working with a temporary newcomer.

## General Discussion

This research was designed to contribute to the literature on deviance and group socialization by investigating when and how newcomers, who are generally seen as marginal members (Cimino & Delton, 2010), can themselves influence the degree to which groups utilize their dissenting knowledge. We argued that a newcomer's structural role (having permanent or temporary future prospects in the group) would condition the extent to which groups take social considerations into account, needing to accept newcomers before capitalizing on their dissenting knowledge. We therefore hypothesized that their structural role would likewise qualify the extent to which newcomers need to calibrate the way they present themselves to their groups (using the integrating language-based identity strategy vs.

the more commonly used differentiating language-based identity strategy).

In two experiments, we found support for our central hypothesis. The results demonstrate that *permanent* newcomers are more readily accepted when they use the integrating language strategy that emphasizes the new group rather than the differentiating language strategy that emphasizes separation from the group, and this acceptance, in turn, enhances the utilization of their dissenting knowledge. These effects are less pronounced in the case of temporary newcomers. Temporary newcomers are not accepted more readily when using the integrating strategy instead of the differentiating strategy, and benefited to a lesser extent from this strategy in terms of increasing the utilization of their dissenting knowledge. In line with earlier findings (Rink & Ellemers, 2009), groups seemed to become so task-focused in the presence of temporary newcomers that their willingness to utilize newcomers' knowledge was relatively high overall.

The current research makes several contributions to the literature on group responses to newcomers and their use of dissenting new knowledge. First, it responds to recent calls in the literature to further examine *why* groups often are not making the best use of the unique task knowledge that newcomers possess (Levine & Choi, 2011; Rink et al., 2013). Prior work suggested that for newcomers with long-term structural roles in groups, or permanent prospects, this lack of knowledge utilization arises from social concerns about newcomers' interest in the group. This work fits with the group identity literature, arguing that more generally, groups become accepting of others who act in ways that emphasize the group and its common goals (Hornsey, Blackwood, & O'Brien, 2005; Rink & Ellemers, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2000). We indeed show that permanent newcomers who address these concerns with an integrating strategy that signals their willingness to take on the new group's identity encountered social acceptance, and hence, a group's willingness to utilize their unique knowledge.

Second, this research provides further additional evidence for the notion that newcomers

can strategically improve the way they are perceived by groups, and thus joins an emerging stream of literature arguing that deviates should not be seen as passive members in need of help assimilating; they should instead be viewed as members capable of proactively influencing their own social acceptance (Burke, Kraut, & Joyce, 2010; Chen, 2005; Hansen & Levine, 2009; Kane & Rink, 2015). At the same time, however, our research does demonstrate that there are some important conditions that a priori influence the extent to which groups consider social deliberations in their responses toward newcomers, such as the extent to which a newcomer's structural role imparts permanent future prospects in the group (or not). Indeed, we found that the integrating strategy was not particularly useful for temporary newcomers—it enhanced knowledge utilization to some degree in the group study, but on average, its effect was less pronounced than in the case of permanent newcomers. This work provides a more nuanced understanding of *when* newcomers need to calibrate their behavior to alleviate group affiliative concerns. In doing so, our research corroborates prior research where fixed newcomer characteristics also influenced group reactions toward newcomers (Levine & Choi, 2011; Rink & Kane, 2014). From these different research findings, it can be inferred that the utilization of dissenting newcomer knowledge arises from a convergence of newcomer characteristics, newcomer behavior, and even group characteristics, rather than by any of these characteristics or newcomer behaviors alone.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Although our experimental designs enhance the internal validity of the findings, they do restrict generalization to newcomers and group contexts similar to those captured in these studies. Future research would benefit from investigating the generalizability of these findings to other contexts. Along related lines, with the interactive group study design, it was not possible to assess newcomer acceptance in a nonreactive manner (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). It would thus be

profitable for future research to develop noninvasive methodologies for assessing psychological responses during real-time group interactions. In addition, future research could also make a contribution by examining group receptivity to newcomers over a longer time horizon. This is worthwhile because the relationship between newcomer acceptance and knowledge utilization may, under some conditions, be mutually reinforcing in nature. So although theory strongly supports the view that most groups tend to have social concerns about their newest additions, and thus give primacy to detecting whether newcomers can psychologically be accepted as full group members before utilizing their dissenting knowledge, it may be that over time this utilization may further influence newcomer acceptance. In other words, while it can generally be expected that newcomer acceptance will drive the willingness of groups to utilize dissenting newcomer knowledge initially, the subsequent value of this knowledge may in turn further strengthen (or weaken) the social acceptance of this newcomer. This argumentation can be tested in the field longitudinally or in (quasi-) experiments that follow groups over an extended time frame across collaboration contexts. As indicated by Rink et al. (2013), such research designs would enable scholars to establish, for example, whether knowledge utilization may eventually also increase newcomer acceptance in cases where it enables newcomers to demonstrate their worth to the group (pp. 272–273)

Finally, in our experiments, the structural roles of newcomers coincided with distinct and fixed membership prospects (i.e., permanent vs. temporary). Yet we acknowledge that newcomers' roles can change within groups, depending, for example, on the departure of other group members and on newcomers' own performance (Chen, 2005; Rink & Ellemers, 2009). Moreover, it is well known that organizations attract and maintain many different types of temporary employees, varying from support staff brought in through employment agencies to respond to workload fluctuations to independent consultants contracted for specific organizational

projects and experienced employees transferred between groups for job crafting purposes (Ashford et al., 2007; Davis-Blake et al., 2003). As such, it is important to examine whether groups are comparably concerned with social deliberations in all of these cases. For independent consultants, who are primarily contracted for their expertise, it may be unimportant how they present themselves to their groups because it is unlikely that they need to establish social acceptance before groups will utilize their knowledge. On the other hand, research suggests that groups may be relationship oriented when temporary newcomers come from another work group within the organization and thus already share a superordinate identity (Argote & Kane, 2009; Kane et al., 2005). It may be that groups become suspicious when these temporary newcomers do not calibrate their behavior, using a differentiating language strategy that signals greater attachment to their personal identity than to the group's identity or the organization's overarching identity. Accordingly, temporary transfers from within the organization may cause groups to develop different social expectations for newcomers than temporary additions from outside the organization. In order to test this argumentation, we call for more research.

### *Conclusion*

The current research examined the conditions under and processes through which dissenting newcomers can proactively shape their social environments, replacing group resistance to deviance with receptivity. Newcomers with a permanent group appointment are advised to direct their behavior with the use of an integrating strategy (i.e., plural pronouns) that signals an interest in belonging to the group rather than rely on the commonly used differentiating strategy (i.e., singular pronouns). The former identity strategy motivates groups to socially accept these permanent newcomers, which, in turn, renders groups willing to utilize their knowledge. By contrast, groups display a willingness to utilize knowledge from newcomers with temporary group appointments

somewhat irrespective of newcomer behavior or acceptance. These findings provide insights that can help organizations and newcomers themselves manage socialization in ways that better enable groups to benefit from the unique knowledge offered by newcomers with permanent and temporary group appointments.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the A. J. and Sigismunda Palumbo Charitable Trust (Grant # G1400053).

### Notes

1. Other oblique rotations, such as promax, produce essentially the same pattern of loadings. A table of these results is available from the authors upon request.
2. The scenario also included reading checks asking participants the name of the organization (i.e., DynaOrg), its specialty (i.e., development of new medical devices), as well as what just happened in the team (i.e., the newcomer made a suggestion). Six participants answered two questions incorrectly, and 29 answered one incorrectly. Yet conclusions from the analyses remain unchanged when including or excluding these 35 participants. As currently recommended (Paolacci & Chandler, 2014), we report results based on the full sample. Results from the reduced sample are available from the authors upon request.
3. Conclusions from the reported results are based on polynomial contrasts, and are fully consistent with conclusions drawn from Bonferroni pairwise comparisons adjusted for multiple comparisons.
4. Confidence intervals were calculated in SPSS 22 using PROCESS Model 59 described in Hayes (2013) and available at [www.afhayes.com](http://www.afhayes.com). Other specifications such as the percentile-based bootstrap yield nearly equivalent confidence intervals. These tables are available from the authors upon request.
5. Using PROCESS, we also examined the reverse causal order (i.e., groups accept newcomers because they provide the group task knowledge). This reversed reasoning would imply that groups are in fact task focused toward their newest members, and only socially accept them to the extent that they make a meaningful task contribution to the collective. This assumption will be confirmed when groups use newcomer knowledge, regardless of the social considerations that can be derived from whether newcomers are appointed temporarily or permanently. The results do not support this reasoning. Knowledge utilization did impact newcomer acceptance, but this effect was conditional on a newcomer's future prospects,  $p = .006$ . That is, the conditional indirect effect was significant for permanent newcomers,  $B = .41$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ , 95% CI [0.20, 0.75], but not for temporary newcomers,  $B = .03$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ , 95% CI [-0.19, 0.30]. Moreover, the magnitude of the indirect effect of this reverse order was smaller,  $B = .41$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ , than the one obtained in the analysis conducted in the hypothesized direction,  $B = .60$ ,  $SE = 0.21$ . These results suggest that it is more likely that newcomer acceptance influences willingness to utilize newcomer knowledge, rather than vice versa.
6. We used video recordings and practice sessions to train two undergraduate student confederates, who were similar to one another in gender (female), race (Caucasian), and age (20), to deliver both of the identity strategies and demonstrate the better work routine. As intended, there was no significant difference in study variables on the basis of one confederate versus another joining the group (e.g., knowledge utilization was not higher for one confederate compared to another,  $X^2 = .63$ ,  $p = .43$ ).
7. Before the newcomer made this suggestion, the group had completed its first 12-step sailboat, with the newcomer having contributed the initial steps.

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