

Finding one's own way: How newcomers who differ stay well

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Abstract

Purpose - Being different from others can be stressful, and this may be especially salient for newcomers during organizational socialization when they may be expected to fit in. Thus, drawing on conservation of resources theory, the authors examine the effects of newcomers' individual differentiation on their subsequent emotional exhaustion.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors test a multiple mediation model with data from 161 UK graduates collected at three times using structural equation modeling.

Findings - The results largely support the hypotheses, identifying individual differentiation as a motivational resource associated with the proactive behavior of changing work procedures. In turn, changing work procedures links with the personal resource of positive affect, which facilitates the relational resource of social acceptance and predicts lower emotional exhaustion. Individual differentiation predicts lower social acceptance also, but not via monitoring as anticipated.

Originality – The results provide novel insights into the effects of individual differentiation on emotional exhaustion in the context of organizational socialization. The study highlights that, while newcomers high in individual differentiation face depletion of the relational resource of social acceptance, they can still adjust well and avoid emotional exhaustion through changing work procedures to foster positive affect.

Keywords: organizational socialization; conservation of resources theory; individual differentiation; emotional exhaustion

Research type: Research paper

Introduction

With organizations seeking to acquire and build unique talent, they may look to newcomers who bring different skills and perspectives (Harris *et al.*, 2014). However, being different can be harmful to newcomers' wellbeing. For example, employees who deviate from group norms may experience increased relationship conflict (Guillaume *et al.*, 2013) and lower levels of well-being (Findler *et al.*, 2007). During organizational socialization, newcomers who differ may redefine or even reject aspects of their work environment, yet this diversity of approach may not be welcome (Hurst *et al.*, 2012). Thus, when organizations take strategic risks by hiring new employees to capitalize on their unique skills (Tharenou and Kulik, 2020), it is important for all parties to understand the risks and put in place resources that help such newcomers stay well.

Hence, a primary aim of the present study is to investigate how newcomers who differ manage their differentness and maintain good health. We use the construct of individual differentiation to capture the broad array of ways in which people view themselves as different in terms of personal opinions, skills, beliefs, and unique perspectives on problems (Janssen and Huang, 2008). Newcomers may be hired for their distinctive ideas (Harris *et al.*, 2014; Vogel *et al.*, 2016), with individual differentiation motivating individual creativity (Janssen and Huang, 2008). Here, we frame individual differentiation as an individual difference which influences proactive behavior and newcomer adjustment.

Specifically, drawing on conservation of resources (COR) theory, which suggests that individuals are motivated to protect, maintain, and acquire valued resources (Hobfoll, 2001), we propose individual differentiation will both motivate and demotivate proactive behaviors to safeguard resources. For example, newcomers high in individual differentiation will protect valued personal resources of their personal identity and uniqueness by avoiding or deploying

different proactive behavior: not changing themselves via the proactive behavior of monitoring, and instead investing their energies into the proactive behavior of changing work procedures. In turn, we expect low monitoring and high changing work procedures will restrict newcomers from obtaining the relational resource of social acceptance, and consequently they will experience high emotional exhaustion. Concurrently, changing work procedures may benefit newcomers who differ by eliciting the personal resource of positive affect. In line with the resource loss and acquisition affinities within COR, whereby resource losses are linked to further losses and resources gains with further gains, we propose that both resources of social acceptance and positive affect support wellbeing in the form of lower emotional exhaustion. Also, in line with resources being deployed to acquire further resources, we anticipate a positive bidirectional relationship between the relational resource of social acceptance and the personal resource of positive affect.

Our study makes three contributions. First, given the backdrop of increasing workplace diversity (*e.g.*, skilled migrants, Tharenou and Kulik, 2020; multi-generational workforce, Dutta and Mishra, 2021), research on how to promote the wellbeing of newcomers who differ is of ever-increasing importance (Hurst *et al.*, 2012). To address this issue, we investigate how individual differentiation exerts its influence in predicting resource-based outcomes and newcomer wellbeing. This is the first study to highlight the role of individual differentiation in newcomer wellbeing. Second, contrasting the prior focus on how a supportive environment enables newcomers' change-oriented behaviors (*e.g.*, Ashforth *et al.*, 2007; Harris *et al.*, 2014), we propose focusing on the agency of the newcomer to bring about change to make the work environment fit them better. Specifically, we frame individual differentiation within COR theory to provide an alternative, individually-focused lens explaining why some newcomers are

motivated to take the initiative and change how work is done. Third, we answer the research call to examine “how people conceptualize resources and the processes by which people conserve and acquire resources” (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014, p. 4) by offering a multiple mediation model elaborating how and why newcomers who differ can marshal their resources to stay well.

Theory and hypotheses

COR theory

COR theory is an integrated resource-based theory that explains individual striving to maintain wellbeing in challenging situations (Hobfoll, 2001, 2011). The fundamental principle of COR proposes that individuals cope with potential threats by “positioning themselves and their resources in an advantageous position” (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 352). That is, when individuals perceive their resources as being inadequate to cope with an upcoming challenging situation, rather than wait for the loss to occur, they will invest their personal resources to obtain the additional resources necessary to buffer the potential threat (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014).

Newcomer adjustment constitutes a challenging situation in which newcomers will aim to conserve and attain resources to maintain their wellbeing (Ellis *et al.*, 2015).

In a theoretical paper drawing on COR and the job demands-resources model, Ellis and colleagues (2015) identified three types of resources that newcomers may deploy or accrue to avoid emotional exhaustion, a core aspect of wellbeing. These are personal resources (*e.g.*, self-efficacy and affect), relational resources (*e.g.*, social support and team expectations), and structural resources (*e.g.*, amount and utility of training programs). Of these, we focus on personal and relational resources which the newcomer may be able to conserve or build (LaPointe and Vandenberghe, 2018), contrasting with structural resources which depend on the organization. Given that people high in individual differentiation focus on their personal

preferences and individual successes (Cross *et al.*, 2011), the personal resource of positive affect – reflecting a focus by the individual on their own affective status – is relevant to our research question. Positive affect indicates positive newcomer adjustment (Nifadkar and Bauer, 2016; Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012), with Ellis *et al.* (2015) suggesting that positive affect provides a critical personal resource enabling newcomers to reduce the experience of stress and burnout. The second resource we investigate is social acceptance, a relational resource representing acceptance and integration with colleagues, a core feature of newcomer adjustment (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). Concerns about relationships with colleagues and failure to achieve social acceptance restrict newcomers' access to supportive sources when needed, hindering adjustment (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012; Nifadkar and Bauer, 2016).

Individual differentiation as a motivational resource

Individual differences provide personal motivational resources linked to specific newcomer proactive behaviors which, in turn, enable adjustment. Previous socialization research has shown that newcomers' prior work experience can enhance personal workplace learning (Anakwe and Greenhaus, 2000); newcomers' desire for control predicts proactive behaviors including information seeking and negotiating job changes (Ashford and Black, 1996); and curiosity is a key personal resource encouraging proactive behaviors of information seeking and positive framing (Harrison *et al.*, 2011).

Individuals differ in their willingness to engage in behaviors that differentiate themselves from others (Maslach *et al.*, 1985). People who wish to differentiate themselves identify situations that enable them to emphasize their distinctiveness rather than modifying themselves to become more socially appropriate (Whitney *et al.*, 1994). People high in individual differentiation express self-views (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004), seek ways to defend their own

identity (Janssen and Huang, 2008), and support their personal interests (Cross *et al.*, 2003). As such, we position individual differentiation as a personal motivational resource underpinning newcomer proactive behavior, guiding newcomers to select or reject proactive behaviors to maintain their differentness, rather than modifying themselves to the social context.

Newcomer proactive behaviors

In a model of work-role transition, Nicholson (1984) argued that newcomers may change themselves to fit into the work environment, or alternatively, modify the work environment to fit their individual needs. Examples of behaviors that enable personal change include monitoring and feedback-seeking (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012); behaviors targeting role innovation include changing how tasks are completed (Bunce and West, 1994). Here, we focus on two of these behaviors that enable personal change and role innovation respectively, namely monitoring and changing work procedures.

Monitoring involves observing the context, including people and situational cues, to learn local ways of doing things (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012; Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992). This aligns with the domain of personal change emphasizing “reflective change in the individual” that is enabled through monitoring (Nicholson and West, 1988, p. 105).

Alternatively, newcomers can change work procedures to tailor the way a job is done to meet individual needs and requirements (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This aligns conceptually with the domain of role innovation which emphasizes changing the job role to meet individual needs and requirements (Nicholson and West, 1988).

Individual differentiation, monitoring and social acceptance

First, drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 2001), we propose that newcomers high in individual differentiation are less likely to engage in monitoring. Specifically, newcomers high in

individual differentiation will wish to protect their authentic uniqueness as a resource, and therefore reject requirements to undergo personal changes to achieve adjustment (Kahn, 1990). Moreover, although persuading newcomers to learn norms and rules may help them assimilate into the group (Ashforth *et al.*, 2007; Bauer *et al.*, 2007), this may be too costly in terms of personal efforts and resources for newcomers who differ. Therefore, we expect that newcomers high in individual differentiation will protect their personal resources and forego opportunities to monitor others.

Nonetheless, monitoring is a useful proactive behavior, assisting newcomers to alter their actions to match local standards and norms (Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992), and facilitate interaction with coworkers (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). Monitoring helps newcomers learn referent values (i.e., social norms and rules), develop social relationships (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2014; Morrison, 1993), and build relational resources (LaPointe and Vandenberghe, 2018). Taken together, we propose that individual differentiation has a negative indirect effect on social acceptance via monitoring. That is, newcomers high in individual differentiation are less likely to change self via monitoring others, in turn making them less likely to be accepted by colleagues.

H1: Individual differentiation has a negative indirect effect on social acceptance via monitoring.

Monitoring, social acceptance, and emotional exhaustion

Social acceptance is helpful for newcomers, facilitating wellbeing and reducing stress (Ellis *et al.*, 2015). For example, Kramer (1993) found transferee newcomers with more collegial (versus informational) supervisor and coworker relationships reported less stress and role ambiguity.

Conversely, Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) found that new software engineers in India who

experienced relationship conflict with coworkers had greater social anxiety. Thus, when newcomers lack relational resources, they are more at risk of experiencing emotional exhaustion.

Newcomers who engage in monitoring are more likely to learn and adopt local norms and values, and thus achieve greater social acceptance (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). In turn, access to relational resources can help to maintain further resources and stave off threats to resources (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). On this basis, social acceptance is likely to predict higher wellbeing, here operationalized as lower emotional exhaustion. Contrasting this, newcomers who reject opportunities to monitor others are less likely to gain social acceptance, restricting these newcomers' ability to gain valuable guidance and social support as relational resources, and in turn predicting lower emotional exhaustion.

H2: Monitoring has a negative indirect effect on emotional exhaustion via social acceptance.

Individual differentiation, changing work procedures, and social acceptance

As discussed above, newcomers high in individual differentiation will view this as a valuable resource to be protected. Moreover, employees high in individual differentiation are motivated to behave differently, expressing their own views, challenging rules, and initiating change (Janssen and Huang, 2008). One way that newcomers can initiate change to express their distinctiveness is through changing work procedures, that is, tailoring the way a job is done to meet individual needs and requirements (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2014), akin to innovative coping (Bunce and West, 1994). Notably, changing work procedures conceptually overlaps with task-related aspects of job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Because our focus is on newcomers, we maintain consistent terminology with that literature and focus on changing work procedures.

While changing work procedures to suit individual needs can help to protect resources of uniqueness and personal identity for those newcomers high in individual differentiation, such behavior may also bring social costs (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012). For example, Janssen (2003) found that innovative behavior was associated with conflicts and less satisfactory relationships with colleagues. Moreover, people who emphasize differences find it more difficult to interact and communicate with their peers, and evoke more dislike and receive less social support (Guillaume *et al.*, 2013). Integrating these ideas, we propose an indirect effect of individual differentiation on social acceptance via changing work procedures. Specifically, newcomers with higher individual differentiation are more likely to change work procedures, but by doing so will experience lower social acceptance.

H3: Individual differentiation has a negative indirect effect on social acceptance via changing work procedures.

Individual differentiation, changing work procedures, and positive affect

The resource investment tenet of COR theory suggests that individuals utilize different resources to buffer stress and maintain wellbeing (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014). When one type of resource is unavailable, people deploy other resources at their disposal (Troughakos *et al.*, 2014). As such, under the potential difficulty of acquiring the relational resource of social acceptance, newcomers high in individual differentiation may be motivated to obtain or conserve personal resources. In other words, newcomers who differ forge a path through socialization by doing things their own way. Here we focus on positive affect as a personal resource representing newcomers' adjustment experiences (Nifadkar *et al.*, 2012), and argue that changing work procedures offers such a strategy for eliciting positive affect. Changing work procedures can trigger positive feelings because newcomers can visibly demonstrate the value of their ability to

do things differently and innovate (Nicholson, 1984; Nicholson and West, 1988). Changing work procedures may arouse a sense of competence (Ryan and Deci, 2017), and boost newcomers' perceptions of autonomy and control over the work environment (Cross *et al.*, 2003), in turn eliciting positive affect, characterized by happiness, excitement and elation (George and Brief, 1992). Moreover, newcomers who change work procedures to meet their individual needs are more likely to achieve cognitive and behavioral consistency. Individuals who maintain consistent self-concepts across different roles or situations report higher levels of satisfaction than do individuals who have more variable self-concepts (Donahue *et al.*, 1993). In line with these findings, we propose an additional positive indirect effect:

H4: Individual differentiation has a positive indirect effect on positive affect via changing work procedures.

Changing work procedures, positive affect and emotional exhaustion

As discussed above, we expect the proactive behavior of changing work procedures will foster the personal resource of positive affect. In turn, newcomers can deploy positive affect as a personal resource to combat emotional exhaustion and thus maintain wellbeing. Consistent with COR theory, studies have demonstrated that positive affect acts as a personal resource that facilitates the attainment of other personal resources, including self-efficacy (Tsai *et al.*, 2007) and human flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001). Similarly, Tice *et al.* (2007) conducted a series of experiments and found positive affect can replenish depleted resources, improve self-regulation, and counteract negative emotions and tiredness. Hence, we extend our previous arguments linking changing work procedures to positive affect, to propose the following:

H5: Changing work procedures has a negative indirect effect on emotional exhaustion via positive affect.

Social acceptance and positive affect

Based on COR theory, individuals with plentiful resources can invest these to build further resources, protecting themselves against negative wellbeing outcomes (Hobfoll, 2001). Turning to the personal and relational resources investigated here, we propose that a high level of the personal resource of positive affect will be associated with a high level of the relational resource of social acceptance. Specifically, the experience of positive affect can stimulate individuals to widen their scope of awareness and behavioral repertoires, enabling them to build resources (Fredrickson, 2001). For example, individuals with higher positive affect seek out interactions with colleagues (McGrath *et al.*, 2017) and can thus develop relational resources.

Conversely, individuals with fewer resources are less able to invest current resources to acquire additional resources, and therefore are more vulnerable to resource losses (Hobfoll, 2001). Consequently, newcomers who are not well integrated with colleagues face restricted opportunities to develop social support networks (Hurst *et al.*, 2012). In turn, this reduces newcomers' ability to achieve task mastery via colleagues (Bauer *et al.*, 2007), constrains personal accomplishment (Halbesleben, 2006), and results in unpleasant psychological status. Therefore, accounting for the bidirectional effects between these resources, we hypothesize as follows:

H6: Social acceptance and positive affect are positively associated.

Method*Procedure and participants*

Data were collected at three time points from graduates of a UK university. Research ethical approval from the university was obtained. Invitation emails were first sent to all those who had completed undergraduate studies and were now in their first month of employment. Personal

information (e.g., age and gender) and individual differentiation were collected at Time 1 in that first month. At Time 2, one month later, we collected information on proactive behaviors of changing work procedures and monitoring, and as a control variable the work characteristic of job autonomy. At Time 3, during their third month of employment, we measured positive affect, social acceptance, and emotional exhaustion.

At time 1, 156 graduates participated Survey 1. We then sent them the link of Survey 2 at Time 2 and received 102 responses. Of these response, 94 responded Survey 3 at Time 3. Due to the low response rate, we decided to send a combined survey (Survey 1 and Survey 2) to the complete database of recent graduates at Time 2 who did not join Survey 1, hoping to capture those who had recently started a new job. An additional 109 graduates responded to this combined survey. Of these responses, 82 joined Survey 3. To assess for difference between these samples, we conducted *t*- and chi-square tests, and found no significant difference on all the key variables. Altogether, 161 responses were used for analysis. The average age of these participants was 23.6 years' old. Of these, 58.4% were female and 87.6% were white.

Measures

Likert agreement scales with 5 points were used across all measures (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”), with the exception of individual differentiation, monitoring, and change work procedures, which used ratings of amount (1 = “not at all” to 5 = “to a great extent”).

Individual differentiation. We assessed individual differentiation using a scale developed by Janssen and Huang (2008). Participants responded to the question: “To what extent are you different from the members of your team owing to...”, followed by 7 items, for example “your personal opinions and beliefs” and “remarkable skills and abilities.”

Monitoring. Monitoring was measured using a 3-item scale from Cooper-Thomas *et al.* (2014). An example item is, “Paid close attention to your colleagues to learn appropriate behavior.”

Changing work procedures. We used a 3-item scale from Cooper-Thomas *et al.* (2014) to measure changing work procedures, with an example item being, “Changed how the work gets done to suit you better.”

Social acceptance. We measured social acceptance using a 4-item scale developed by Morrison (1993). An example item is “My coworkers seem to accept me as one of them.”

Positive affect. Positive affect was assessed using a 10-item scale from Watson *et al.* (1988). Participants were asked if they had felt 10 types of positive affect during the last week (*e.g.*, Tsai *et al.*, 2007), with items including “attentive” and “excited.”

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was assessed with a 4-item scale from Ahuja *et al.* (2007), which they adapted from Maslach and Jackson (1981). An example item is “I feel emotionally drained from my work.”

Control variables. Newcomers’ ability to behave proactively could be enabled or constrained by their job autonomy, and hence we controlled for job autonomy in analyses. Job autonomy was measured using four items adopted from Breugh (1985), for example “I am able to choose the way to go about my job (the procedures to utilize).”

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Analytic strategy

SPSS 24 was applied for descriptive analyses. We then conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) via Amos 24. Indirect relationships were tested using PROCESS v3 (Hayes, 2017). Following the suggestion of Little *et al.* (2002), three parcels

of items were developed for the variables of individual differentiation and positive affect due to higher numbers of items. There were two reasons for this approach. First, parceling can optimize the variable to sample size ratio for smaller samples, resulting in more stable parameter estimates (Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994). Second, the use of parceling can help to decrease the item-specific biases and random error (Matsunaga, 2008).

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables are displayed in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The CFA showed strong and statistically significant standardized parameter estimates. The seven-factor measurement model provided an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 (231, N = 161) = 257.47, p = .112$; CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .027). We compared this measurement model with plausible alternative models (see Table 3), including a five-factor model and a one-factor model. The hypothesized seven-factor model yielded a better fit than the alternative models.

Additionally, we assessed for common method variance in two ways. First, we used Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), with the first factor extracted accounting for only 29.99% of the total variance. Second, we compared two measurement models, one including only the main variables and the other including an additional common latent factor; there was no difference, indicating the common latent factor accounted for none of the total variance ($\Delta \chi^2 = 0, \Delta df = 1, \Delta CFI = 0$). Overall, there is no evidence for common method variance being a concern.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Hypothesis testing

The data were fitted to the hypothesized model, with the results showing an acceptable fit ($\chi^2(242, N = 161) = 280.87, p = .044$; CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .032). To assess adequacy, we followed previous studies by comparing the hypothesized model against two theoretically plausible alternatives (*e.g.*, Tsai *et al.*, 2007). As shown in Table 2, we first compared the hypothesized fully mediated model with a no mediation model, with the χ^2 difference supporting the hypothesized model as having significantly better fit ($\Delta \chi^2 = 30.77, \Delta df = 2, p < .001$).

Next, we compared the hypothesized fully mediated model with a partially mediated model, with the hypothesized model again superior ($\Delta \chi^2 = 8.72, \Delta df = 5, p = .121$), but the partially-mediated model indicating an additional significant direct relationship between individual differentiation and social acceptance. Consequently, we tested the hypothesized model with the addition of this significant direct path, which showed better fit to the data ($\chi^2(241, N = 161) = 276.83, p = .056$; CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .030). This model is illustrated in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The indirect effects are presented in Table 3. Individual differentiation was not negatively related to social acceptance via monitoring (indirect effect = $-.010$, 95% CI = $[-.050, .016]$), or via changing work procedures (indirect effect = $.006$, 95% CI = $[-.057, .075]$), providing no support for Hypothesis 1 or Hypothesis 3. An indirect effect was found from monitoring via social acceptance to emotional exhaustion (indirect effect = $-.108$, 95% CI = $[-.298, -.010]$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Additionally, a significant indirect effect was found between individual differentiation and positive affect via changing work procedures (indirect effect = $.133$, 95% CI

= [.033, .293]), supporting Hypothesis 4. A significant indirect effect was also found between changing work procedures via positive affect with emotional exhaustion (indirect effect = $-.081$, 95% CI = $[-.190, -.018]$), supporting Hypothesis 5. Apart from the hypothesized indirect relationships, we also tested the new path added, and found a significant indirect relationship between individual differentiation and emotional exhaustion via social acceptance (indirect effect = $.120$, 95% CI = $[.004, .326]$). In addition, there was a significant relationship between social acceptance and positive affect ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 6.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

We tested the total indirect effect of individual differentiation on emotional exhaustion using bootstrapping, with bias-corrected estimation with 2,000 resampling samples and 95% confidence intervals. In the revised model, the total indirect effect of individual differentiation on emotional exhaustion depends on the balance of these two simultaneous yet antagonistic pathways: A positive indirect effect via (low levels of) social acceptance, and a negative indirect effect via changing work procedures and positive affect. The nonsignificant result (total indirect effect = $.078$, 95% CI = $[-.058, .316]$) shows that these two opposing indirect effect pathways cancel each other out, resulting in the null total indirect effect. In other words, for newcomers high in individual differentiation, the personal resource of positive affect elicited from changing work procedures balances out the depletion of the relational resource of social acceptance in predicting emotional exhaustion.

Discussion

In line with COR theory, we proposed that newcomers aim to protect and acquire valued resources in order to cope with the challenges of being new (Ellis *et al.*, 2015; LaPointe and

Vandenberghe, 2018). Newcomers high in individual differentiation altered how work was done through the proactive behavior of changing work procedures and felt good about it through positive affect, in turn experiencing better wellbeing in the form of lower emotional exhaustion. These findings are consistent with the central resource-focused premises of COR theory, supporting earlier conceptual work arguing for the utility of applying a resource-based lens to newcomer socialization (Ellis *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, for newcomers who differ, changing aspects of the work environment to better suit themselves represents an active strategy of innovating to deal with difficult and challenging situations (Bunce and West, 1994). A further consideration is that proactive behaviors aiming to change the work environment may be more possible for newcomers with unique talents and high potential, where the organization may be more flexible in accommodating them (Cooper-Thomas and Burke, 2012).

We anticipated individual differentiation would be indirectly associated with social acceptance via both monitoring and changing work procedures, but these paths were not supported. Instead, our analyses revealed a direct negative path from individual differentiation to social acceptance – newcomers who differentiate themselves feel less socially accepted. This aligns with prior organizational studies: When people attempt to defend their individuality and differentiate themselves from others, they are more likely to challenge set rules and initiate change (Goncalo and Staw, 2006); and when people do not share the predominant traits of the group, they may face exclusion from social interactions (Guillaume *et al.*, 2013). Further, the negative relationship found here between individual differentiation and social acceptance extends those studies by focusing on newcomers instead of more tenured employees.

Both social acceptance and positive affect were associated with lower emotional exhaustion, which supports the protective role of these resources for newcomers (Hobfoll, 2001).

Additionally, we found a positive relationship between these two resources. Thus, newcomers who feel accepted by their colleagues experience greater positive affect. Likewise, newcomers with more positive affect, who feel energetic and enthusiastic, perceive themselves accepted by colleagues. As well as supporting COR theory, in which resources may be used to foster additional resources, this aligns with broaden-and-build dynamics (Fredrickson, 2001), supporting the constructive effects of positive affect for motivating employees to interact with others (McGrath *et al.*, 2017), and reducing the likelihood of resource loss.

From a practical standpoint, newcomers will vary in their level of individual differentiation. Indeed, with organizations looking to secure unique talents and skills (Tharenou and Kulik 2020) and more diverse types of employees entering the workforce (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2021), organizations may increasingly hire newcomers who differ along various dimensions. Our resource-based model suggests that there may not be a one-size-fits-all approach for managers when facilitating newcomer adjustment. Instead, managers should assess both the degree to which newcomers view themselves being different, and whether newcomers bring unique talent that is advantageous to the organization. In such cases, onboarding programmes should be designed accordingly, with built-in flexibility.

For the two proactive behaviors of monitoring and change work procedures, these were indirectly linked with lower emotional exhaustion via either the personal or relational resources of positive affect and social acceptance respectively. Thus, newcomers who utilize these proactive behaviors achieve better adjustment. Although we did not find an association between individual differentiation and monitoring, it is possible that some types of monitoring may be acceptable to newcomers who differ, for example, if they can be selective both in terms of who and what they choose to monitor, and what they adopt or reject for their own practices (Harris *et*

al., 2020). Selective monitoring can be encouraged through careful matching in mentoring, buddying, and apprentice-type learning experiences (Ostroff and Kozlowski, 1992), for example learning from insiders who are also high in individual differentiation or who differ in other ways.

In addition, our finding suggests that newcomers high in individual differentiation experience lower social acceptance. This is a concern since a sense of belonging and social acceptance predicts important adjustment outcomes such as organizational commitment, performance, and turnover (Bauer et al., 2007). Given that such newcomers have a harder time establishing social connections, an implication is that organizations may have to provide more structural support to enable this. Relatedly, since newcomers with positive affect are more likely to experience social acceptance and lower emotional exhaustion. Interventions could be directed at enhancing newcomers' ability to generate positive affect, for example by cultivating inclusive atmosphere, or providing opportunities for successful task completion, in turn building their enthusiasm and engagement (Korte and Lin, 2013).

Limitations and future research

Despite the contributions of the present study, some limitations should be considered. First of all, Halbesleben *et al.* (2014) mentioned that, in more individualistic cultures (*e.g.*, the US and Western European countries), individuals may be motivated to emphasize their uniqueness and express individuality. Therefore, the types and the interpretation of resources may be culturally nested (Hobfoll, 2011). Hence, it would be interesting to test this resource-based model in other contexts. For example, when considering the value of resources, employees from a collective culture, such as in East Asia, might predominantly value relational resources like social acceptance, and place less emphasis on personal resources such as positive affect.

Moreover, our measures are based on self-reports. Although our analysis provided no evidence of common method biases affecting our results, future research using data from multiple sources over time would further offset such concerns. In addition, this study focuses on only two proactive behaviors, monitoring and changing work procedures; a broader range of proactive behaviors should be investigated in future studies.

In addition, our study provides an initial examination of the dynamics between individual differentiation and emotional exhaustion with newcomers who entered the new workplaces within the first few months. It would be interesting to explore the contextual dynamics and proactive behaviors for newcomers who differ over the longer term, investigating whether and how they develop a sense of belonging and maintain wellbeing.

Conclusion

With twin imperatives of increasing employee diversity and an employer focus on leveraging unique employee talent, both organizations and newcomers who differ desire positive adjustment that makes use of newcomers' distinctive skills and abilities. Through testing a multiple mediation model, we show that newcomers high in individual differentiation, in spite of being distinctive, can achieve positive adjustment, avoiding emotional exhaustion. As such, this study enriches our understanding of how newcomers who differ can maintain well-being, and illustrates the value of a resource-based view of newcomer adjustment, with further work needed to identify the proactive behaviors that enable or inhibit resource acquisition and conservation.

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Table 1. Means, standard deviations, correlations and coefficient alphas for all variables.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Individual differentiation	2.61	0.76	(.87)						
2. Monitoring	3.69	0.92	-.06	(.82)					
3. Changing work procedures	3.07	0.99	.31**	.13	(.78)				
4. Social acceptance	4.22	0.61	-.22**	.25**	-.01	(.84)			
5. Positive affect	3.56	1.02	-.02	.22**	.21**	.40***	(.96)		
6. Emotional exhaustion	2.57	1.06	.18*	-.11	-.02	-.46***	-.47***	(.88)	
7. Job autonomy	3.55	0.91	.03	-.07	.24**	.10	.10	-.16*	(.88)

Note. $N = 161$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Cronbach's alphas appear on the diagonal.

Table 2. Summary of model comparisons of the measurement and structural models.

Models	Description	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\Delta \chi^2$	Δdf	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
<i>Measurement models</i>									
Seven-factor model	Hypothesized measurement model, including the control variable job autonomy	257.47	231	.112	-	-	.99	.99	.027
Five-factor model	Newcomer behavior items combined into one factor and resources items combined into one factor	673.79***	242	.000	408.89***	9	.81	.78	.106
One-factor model	All items were combined into one factor	1683.41***	252	.000	1389.37***	21	.36	.29	.188
<i>Structural models</i>									
Fully mediated	Hypothesized research model	280.87*	242	.044	-	-	.98	.98	.032
Non-mediated	No mediation model in which individual differentiation was directly linked to positive affect,	311.63**	244	.002	30.77***	2	.97	.97	.042

social acceptance and emotional exhaustion, and change work procedures and monitoring were directly linked to emotional exhaustion.

Partially mediated	Hypothesized model plus direct links from individual differentiation to positive affect, social acceptance and emotional exhaustion, from change work procedures to emotional exhaustion, and from monitoring to emotional exhaustion.	272.15	237	.058	8.72	5	.98	.98	.030
Final model	Hypothesized model plus a direct link from individual differentiation to social acceptance.	276.83	241	.056	4.03*	1	.98	.98	.030

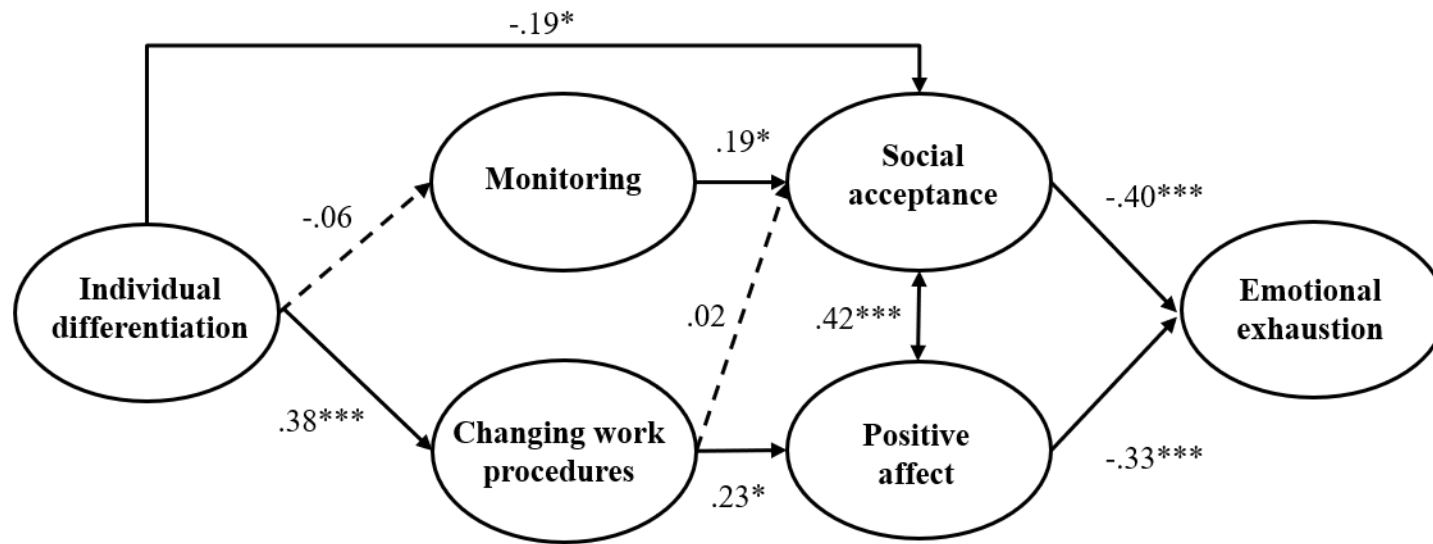
Note. $N = 161$. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$. All models include the control variable job autonomy.

Table 3. Results of indirect effects.

Description of indirect path	Bootstrapping			BC 95% CI	
	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>lower</i>	<i>upper</i>
Individual differentiation – monitoring – social acceptance (H1)	-.010	.017	.273	[-.050	.016]
Monitoring – social acceptance – emotional exhaustion (H2)	-.108	.072	.028	[-.298	-.010]
Individual differentiation – changing work procedures – social acceptance (H3)	.006	.033	.765	[-.057	.075]
Individual differentiation – changing work procedures – positive affect (H4)	.133	.063	.009	[.033	.293]
Changing work procedures – positive affect – emotional exhaustion (H5)	-.081	.042	.008	[-.190	-.018]
Individual differentiation – social acceptance – emotional exhaustion	.120	.079	.045	[.004	.326]

Note. BC = Bias corrected, CI = Confidence interval, SE = standard error.

Figure 1. Final model with standardized coefficients.



Note: $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$. Dashed line indicates statistically non-significant result.