

COMMUNICATION & LANGUAGE at work

EDITORIAL

The Dark Side of Organizational Socialization

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A main characteristic of late modern societies is the decline of the grand narratives of family, church, government, and nation. The decline of these narratives, as well as the authority of the institutions constituted in and by them, has left an open space, a void if you will. A void that seems to exert an almost gravitational pull on other narratives and other institutions, all of which are eager to occupy the space thus left open.

Theorizing the wider, socio-political ramifications of this phenomenon, led sociologist-cum-philosopher Jürgen Habermas to describe a society in which the logic of the market (i.e., “system imperatives”) would “encroach” on the public sphere, and, hence, on the lifeworlds of individuals. Applying the notion of encroachment to the corporate world, critical organizational scholar Stanley Deetz talks about the “corporate colonization” of the individual’s life world. Against this broader, societal backdrop, Dennis Mumby, from the point of view of critical organizational communication, stipulates that “corporations have become the primary institution for human identity formation”.

The papers in this special edition of the international, peer-reviewed journal *Communication and Language at Work* have all found their intellectual point of departure by integrating and synthesizing – one way or the other – the above-mentioned insights from sociology with the growing critical awareness within the field of organizational discourse and communication studies.

Contrary to the widespread intuition that organizational socialization takes place only in the transitional phase during which a newcomer acquires the work-related skillset needed to fulfill a work role in

an organization, the Communicating Organizations research group sees organizational socialization as a perpetual process aiming, ultimately, at employee identity formation. In this view, organizational socialization is a process that spans and permeates the entirety of an employee life cycle, i.e., from attracting, recruiting, onboarding, developing, to offboarding an employee. Seen as a process aiming at employee identity formation, organizational socialization is not merely a mechanical matter of an employee acquiring a certain skillset; but the much more momentous matter of instilling in an employee the “appropriate” organizational mindset. And that, in essence, is where the special edition would like to enter the conversation. For if indeed a corporate mindset is the ultimate goal of organizational socialization, then the phenomenon in question becomes, *eo ipso*, a phenomenon that transgresses traditional organizational boundaries. We see the ramifications of this phenomenon emerging when employees are expected to (and frequently even encouraged to) act as company ambassadors, to ‘live’ the brand, to participate in employee advocacy programs, and to adhere to company values – not merely at work, but off work as well. Organizational socialization, in this light, is not a mere intra-organizational triviality, but does indeed become a potent transformational vehicle harboring the very real possibility of shepherding extra-organizational identity formation in the individual. By leaning on Diane Vaughan’s phrase “the dark side of organizations”, this special edition aims to contribute to this conversation by offering an in-depth look at the dark side of organizational socialization.

Concretely, this special edition is one result of the 3rd International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Discourse and Communication in Professional Contexts: The Dark Side of Organizational Socialization that the Communicating Organizations research group held at Aalborg University, Denmark, on the 11th and the 12th November of 2021. Of the many high-quality papers that were read at the conference by scholars from all over the world, five papers have been selected, peer-reviewed and subsequently been deemed eligible for publication.

The very first paper in this edition is **Expanding the Theoretical Landscape of Organizational Socialization Research: Institutionalism and Beyond** by Hoffmann and Rasmussen. In this essay the authors develop the conceptual contours of organizations as “moving targets” and discuss how this novel view on organizations may constitute a strong impetus for challenging the traditional theoretical landscape of organizational socialization research.

In the second paper of this edition, i.e., **The Myth of the Ideal Graduate: A Critical Perspective on Narrative Identity Formation in a Cohort of Graduates**, Smith, Løth, and Lasskogen delve deep into the tensions between newcomers’ search for expressing their authentic selves and the pressure to comply with what is coined the myth of the ideal employee. Based on findings from qualitative and longitudinal studies they are able to unravel new aspects of the complex, ongoing negotiation of “who one is” as an employee as well as to illustrate the strategizing that newcomers engage in in order to establish a particular presence in the organization.

The third paper, by Borchmann and Torpegaard, **Resisting Attempts at Organizational Socialization - Ambivalence and Resistance towards the Use of Time Registration**, addresses and analyzes instances of resistance towards managerial attempts at socializing employees to conform to specific forms of behavior. Based on in-depth analyses, the authors go on to discuss the dynamic interplay between the central stakeholders involved. Taking into consideration the political as well as professional concerns of the employee group in focus, the legitimacy of rule-breaking behavior is contemplated.

In **We Are Not “Newly Appointed Staff”: The Dark Side of Ghana’s ‘New’ Public University Management Discourse**, Puorideme presents, discusses, and evaluates how government mobilizes state institutions’ technologies for colonizing the everyday practices of staff and management of public university organizations. With an empirical point of departure in critical discourse analyses of a corpus of incident-relevant letters and press releases, the author is – in the fourth paper of this edition – able to demonstrate instances where academic freedom is evidently under pressure.

Carvalho and Grácio, in the final paper of this edition, **The Dark Side of Mindfulness: Workplace Socialization, Neoliberalism and the Self**, analyze the role of mindfulness in organizational socialization. Against the backdrop of prevailing discourses of neo-liberal selfhood, multiple cases, and meta-analyses, they are able

identify and critically discuss the ramifications of institutionalizing mindfulness as a managerial technique when it is promoted, disseminated, and applied in order to reconfigure workers' subjectivities.

As can easily be inferred from reading the above brief vignettes, the five papers – different though they may be in stance and scope – all pay homage to the call of the conference, i.e., that it is crucial that we explore, analyze, discuss, and critique the phenomenon of organizational socialization. In fact, it is the hope of the Communicating Organizations research group that both the conference and this special edition be but the introductory remarks in an ensuing conversation about organizational socialization – maybe even under a future heading of social responsibility?

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