

How Institutional Socialization Tactics Affects the Drivers of Socialization; Newcomers' Proactivity and Socialization Outcomes

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Available online at: www.isca.in

Received 23rd December 2012, revised 2nd January 2013, accepted 17th February 2013

Abstract

This study investigated the interactive effect of institutional and individual socialization tactics to affect socialization experience of newcomers. In doing so, first, we briefly performed an overview of the proactivity literature. Then, we developed the research model and tested based on a sample of 148 bank clerk who completed surveys at their early career. The results indicated that institutional tactics affect proactive ones and socialization outcomes positively. Meanwhile, some demographics accounted for a significant part of variance in proactivity. We also found that institutional tactics moderate the relationship between proactive tactics and socialization outcomes negatively. These results suggest the need for organizational efforts to interact with newcomers' proactive behaviors to achieve the appropriate socialization outcomes. Finally, we discussed the study results and concluded with normative imperatives in the form of some implications for practice and several calls for future researches.

Keywords: Proactive behavior, newcomers socialization, interactionist perspective, private banks, Iran.

Introduction

The manner by which organizations socialize their new employees has a crucial importance, since it will affect the success of socialization and newcomers' adjustment¹. Organizational socialization is "the process by which an individual comes to appreciate the values, abilities, expected behaviors, and social knowledge essential for assuming an organizational role and for participating as an organizational member"². As it has been quoted by Ashforth et al.³, the socialization is so important that enables newcomers to perceive the existential philosophy and importance of the organization and to acquire their position; this facilitates work adjustment and affects newcomer's long-term success.

The socialization process encompasses many proximal and distal outcomes that make it doubly important; Positive and negative outcomes such as organizational learning, reciprocal compatibility, stress, and self-alienation depending on the effectiveness of the socialization process vary up to 180 degrees. There is no doubt that all the organizations are aware of the importance of socialization process and most of them somehow come to apply it but, what the important are different operational perspectives toward this process that alters the extent to which different organizations benefit from its positive outcomes.

One approach to study the organizational socialization consists of tactics that organizations employ to structure newcomers' socialization experiences⁴. This approach considers individuals as a passive, reactive, and isolated agent and do not completely consider the dynamics of socialization process. An alternative

approach has emerged to realize the socialization which considers individuals as an active agent in socialization process⁴. Due to frequent changes in demand, uncertainty in the workplace, and continuous changes in business processes and products the importance of proactivity has increased and a revision in traditional view toward individuals has become more essential⁵. One of the most important shifts in socialization literature is to authenticate this point that newcomers often play an active role to form and facilitate the socialization process⁶. Because in recent years, the presupposition of the organizational behavior researches about individuals has been shifted from this status that they overcome their weaknesses to a manner in which they improve their strengths in place of work². The third approach which is called interactionist perspective, considers the interaction between individual and organizational factors. This approach is looking for integrating the individual and organizational perspectives by examining how these perspectives are interacting with each other to influence the socialization outcomes⁷.

The socialization process is often operationalized in the two forms of institutional tactics (organizational perspective) and newcomers' proactive tactics (individual perspective). Institutional tactics refer to formal organizational instruments while, proactive tactics refer to informal and individual instruments of self-socializing⁸. Proactive tactics and strategies such as seeking information about the role is an instrument by which newcomers engage in their work environment in order to reduce the existing uncertainty³. According to Ashforth et al.⁸, newcomers receive more useful information through their own active efforts than the organizational-oriented socialization plans. It is indisputable that the interactionist perspective has not

received such attention which is ought to have. Most of the studies in socialization domain have concentrated on how newcomers are socialized by organizations that is, the main focus is on the activities that organizations do. Researchers have investigated the theoretical foundation of both the content and the process of socialization in 1990s and the experimental researches have driven this stream as well⁷. Also in recent decade, the organizational socialization researches have been dramatically grown given the increased workforce mobility and further increasing in the importance of organizational socialization but, these studies had been under domination of cognitive models with emphasis on information and learning².

However, primary researches on newcomers' proactive behaviors have concentrated on the frequency with which they show proactive behavior in relation to traditional socialization outcomes. What is absent in previous studies is the interaction of proactive tactics and institutional tactics in order to affect the socialization outcomes. So, in the present research we study the role of proactive behaviors in the framework of an interactionist perspective. In addition, the predictability of socialization outcomes is investigated in target organizations given the interaction between their employee's proactive behaviors and institutional socialization tactics.

Proactivity; a brief review: Individuals may proactively engage in behaviors that facilitate the person-organization fit. Proactive behavior is a prominent individual concept which has recently penetrated into the organizational sciences. This concept is placed in the two overall categories: those practices which may occur in a wide diversity of situations (i.e. general proactive behaviors) and those practices which have a limited domain because of their occurrence in a unique situation (i.e. context-specific behaviors). General actions include proactive information-seeking, identifying opportunities to improve things, creating favorable conditions, and challenging the status quo, and context-specific ones encompass proactive career management, socialization, feedback-seeking, issue selling, and stress coping⁹. In this study particularly, information-seeking, feedback-seeking, general socializing, and boss relationship building is considered.

According to this viewpoint that the constructive change-oriented behavior is considered as a responsibility in some organizations, naturally the proactive behavior can be in-role or extra-role⁹. Obviously, when proactive behavior is extra-role (as it is in most of the organizations), it is not expected from employees as a duty. Although, the proactive behavior is important for both the employees and organizations, but it is not always appreciated by supervisors¹⁰. As, researchers have pointed out that the supervisors may treat the proactive behavior as a threat¹¹, attempt to ingratiate¹², and ill-timed distraction¹³.

Conceptual model and hypotheses: In recent years, organizational socialization researches have concentrated on two issues: first, the need to adopt an interactionist perspective about the socialization process by researchers and the other, a

conceptual and empirical association with proactive socialization tactics occupied by newcomers⁷. Hence, many studies have been carried out to compare the institutional and individual tactics in order to identify the tendencies and preferences of socialization. For example, Gruman and Saks¹⁴ conducted a study aimed to investigate the university students' preferences for socialization tactics and their willingness to be proactive when starting a new job. The results revealed that the personality predicts the preferences for socialization tactics and the tendencies for proactivity. Particularly, the people who have a high level of agreeableness prefer the institutional socialization tactics and those who have a proactive personality and are high in extraversion are more disposed to be proactive when starting a new job. Probably, such studies have formed a foundation for interactionist perspective in the organizational socialization.

To develop the conceptual model, we used Saks et al. 'study⁶ entitled "the neglected role of proactive behavior and outcomes in newcomer socialization" and the "newcomer-organization tactic interaction model" of Griffin et al.⁷. The most important part of model is its stipulation on this fact that the institutional and individual tactics are not completely independent and the institutional socialization tactics impact on and interact with newcomer proactive socialization tactics to influence socialization outcomes; In other words, the part that illuminates how institutional tactics i. affect the probability of using various tactics by newcomers and ii. moderate the relationship between proactive tactics and socialization outcomes. By combining the models obtained from these studies, the conceptual model of research is developed as follows:

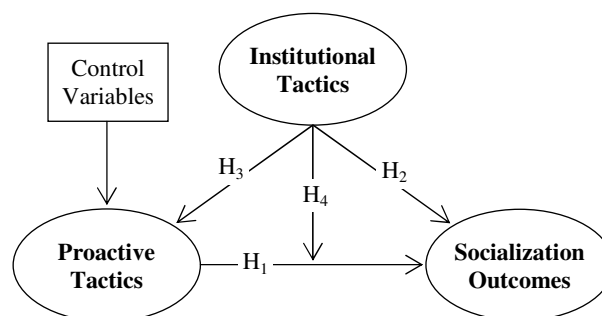


Figure-1
Interactive organizational socialization

Many studies can be found have simultaneously investigated the four under study proactive behaviors i.e. information-seeking, feedback-seeking, general socializing, and boss relationship building in relation to socialization outcomes^{4,6,8,15}. Also, there are studies have examined each proactive behavior separately such as Kuo's study¹⁶ related to information-seeking and Brett et al.'s¹⁷ related to feedback-seeking. Accordingly, we proposed the first hypothesis and its four sub-hypotheses as following: i. H₁: Proactive tactics positively affect the socialization outcomes. ii. H_{1a}: Information-seeking will be positively related to socialization outcomes. iii. H_{1b}: Feedback-seeking will be

positively related to socialization outcomes. iv. H_{1c} : general socializing will be positively related to socialization outcomes. v. H_{1d} : Boss relationship building will be positively related to socialization outcomes.

The studies which have adopted an interactionist approach support the next three hypotheses. Of these studies, the study of Ashforth et al.⁸ and Gruman et al.⁴ is more prominent. In such studies, the interactive effects of both the institutional and individual tactics on socialization outcomes have been examined and the moderating effect of predictor variables has been considered too. In particular, the relationship between institutional tactics and socialization outcomes (H_2) has been investigated by Cable and Parsons¹⁸, and theoretical arguments relating to the relationship between institutional and proactive tactics (H_3) as well as the moderating effect of the institutional tactics on the relationship between proactive tactics and socialization outcomes (H_4) is provided in Griffin et al.'s study⁷. On this basis, we hypothesize the next three relationships can be seen in the following: i. H_2 : Institutional tactics positively affect the socialization outcomes. ii. H_3 : Institutional tactics positively affect the proactive tactics. iii. H_4 : Institutional tactics moderate the relationship between proactive tactics and socialization outcomes.

In this study, we also controlled some demographic variables for proactive behaviors based on the results of previous studies. The control variables included gender¹⁹, age¹⁵, educational level¹⁹, and job tenure²⁰ which is different from organizational tenure and represents for previous job experiences.

Methodology

This is a descriptive survey in private banks of Iran's northeastern city of Mashhad which explains the non-experimental causal relationships between institutional socialization tactics, proactive tactics, and socialization outcomes as well as the moderating effect of institutional tactics on the relationship between the two other variables. This was accomplished using a survey of 148 first-line employees who worked in 13 private banks.

Measures and Methods: To test the first three hypotheses, the structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted in Amos v.20 and tested the moderating hypothesis, multiple regression analysis by applying a SPSS v.19. Some demographical variables were controlled as well. For gathering data, the employees with organizational tenure of less than 2 years in such a banks that had more than 2 years activity background were subject to distribute the questionnaire. 200 questionnaires were distributed randomly, and 148 well-qualified ones were returned so, the final response rate was about 74%. The questionnaire contained items in Persian related to participant's demographics, proactive tactics, institutional tactics, and socialization outcomes. Construct validity of questionnaire was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to see

whether the measurement models were qualified to test hypotheses.

Institutional socialization tactics were measured via Jones's 6-dimensional 30-item scale²¹. Respondents were asked to specify their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An example Item is "There is a sense of being in the same boat amongst newcomers in this organization" ($\alpha = .70$). 14 items from the scale of proactive socialization tactics were used to measure proactivity²². This scale is worded in such a way that measures individual nor institutional tactics and includes the items such as "to what extent have you sought out feedback on your performance during assignments?" and "to what extent have you attended company social gatherings?" ranging from 1 = to no extent to 5 = to a great extent ($\alpha = .64$). To measure the socialization outcomes ($\alpha = .84$) we used the following scales: role clarity scale adopted from Ashford's uncertainty scale²³, task mastery and social integration scales adopted from Morrison²⁴, and intention to stay scale adopted from Lyons²⁵. All the items of these scales were rated on a 5-point spectrum which examples would be "it seems to take me longer than planned to complete my job assignments" and "if I were completely free to choose, I would prefer to keep working in this organization".

Results and discussion

Among the respondents, 64.9% were male and subject's ages ranged from 24 to 39, with an average age of about 30 years ($SD = 8.34$). Participant's average years of job tenure was 1.71 ($SD = 4.32$) years. 16.2% of the respondents reported that the highest level of education they had completed was diploma or lower, 66.2% bachelor degree, 16.2% reported obtaining a master degree or higher, and the rest was unknown. The means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistency among study variables are provided in table 1. It should be noted that the coefficients were not calculated for non-reliable sub-scales of feedback-seeking and general socializing.

Hypotheses testing: Before running SEM model, we assessed common method bias. Because, this was a single-method study with a cross-sectional research design and data were likely to be susceptible to common method variance (CMV). In doing so, we conducted a Harman's single-factor test by performing an un-rotated principal component EFA. There existed 11 distinct factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, the first factor did not account for the majority of the variance (about 21%) and all the factors together accounted for 73% of the total variance. Then, the results of study cannot be attributed to common method bias²⁶. We also conducted a CFA to see if each item is statistically significant loaded to its relevant construct. The measurement models were assessed using fit indices and regression weights significance. Based on the results of CFA models, some of the non-significant items were excluded from

the analysis [Overall CFA indices: $\chi^2_{(26)} = 18.93$; $\chi^2/df = .73$; NFI = .96; CFI = 1; GFI = .98; RMR = .034; RMSEA = .000].

Hypotheses were tested based on the coefficients of fitted SEM model [$\chi^2_{(28)} = 37.59$; $\chi^2/df = 1.34$; NFI = .93; CFI = .98; GFI = .96; RMR = .046; RMSEA = .039]. Hypotheses 1 to 3 postulated that predictor variables would be positively related to their relevant outcome variable. SEM revealed significant effects for proactive tactics ($\beta = .75$, sig = .000) and institutional tactics ($\beta = .52$, sig = .000) on socialization outcomes as well as the significant effect for institutional tactics on proactive tactics ($\beta = .36$, sig = .008). Based on the results of the second SEM model, the sub-hypotheses significance of boss relationship building ($\beta = .33$, sig = .055) and information-seeking ($\beta = .29$, sig = .055) with socialization outcomes were confirmed at $p < .10$. It is noteworthy that, the other two sub-hypotheses were not investigated due to their non-significant regression weight in the SEM model. To test the moderating effect of institutional tactics (H_4), we first created interaction term by multiplying predictor variable with moderator variable and then we conducted a multiple regression analysis following the procedure recommended by Cohen et al.²⁷. To do this, the socialization outcome was regressed on the predictor and

moderator variable in step 1 and interaction term in step 2, and there existed a significant interaction for proactive tactics ($\Delta R^2 = .036$, $p < .01$). Since, the simple slope for interaction term was negative and statistically significant (partial correlation = -.21, $t = -3.20$, sig = .002), it can be said that the proactivity will be less strongly related to high levels of socialization outcomes when the organization applies the institutional tactics simultaneously.

Furthermore, the results of hierarchical multiple regression indicated that some control variables have had a significant influence on proactive behaviors. Proactivity do not vary significantly between the two groups of males and females ($\beta = -.04$, $t = -.65$, sig = .51) but, age was positively related to proactive behaviors ($\beta = .12$, $t = 1.66$, $p < .10$), showing higher levels of proactivity for the older persons. Educational level was positively related to proactive behaviors ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.76$, $p < .01$) indicating more educated employees were more likely to engage in proactive behaviors. In addition, There was a negative significant influence for job tenure ($\beta = -.13$, $t = -1.80$, sig = .10) on proactive behaviors meaning the higher the previous job experience, the lower the proactive behaviors would be.

Table-1
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and internal consistencies

Variables	G	Age	JT	EL	IT	PT	I-S	F-S	GS	BRB	SO
Gender ^a (G)	-										
Age	-.27**	-									
Job Tenure (JT)	-.20**	.44**	-								
Educational Level ^b (EL)	.14*	-.25**	-.22**	-							
Institutional Tactics (IT)	.04	-.09	-.10	-.04	(.70)						
Proactive Tactics (PT)	-.03	.04	-.09	.18**	.16*	(.64)					
Information-seeking (I-S)	.07	.00	-.05	.29**	.05	.60**	(.79)				
Feedback-seeking (F-S)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(.46)			
General Socializing (GS)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(.25)		
Boss Relationship Building (BRB)	-.12	.04	.09	-.00	.06	.37**	.34**	-	-	(.67)	
Socialization Outcomes (SO)	-.14*	.11	.05	.04	.13	.39**	.27**	-	-	.22**	(.84)
Mean	.35	29.95	1.71	1.98	6.29	4.56	3.82	4.32	2.76	2.93	4.67
Standard Deviation	.47	8.34	4.32	.60	.81	.57	.80	.59	1.05	.89	.52

Note: N = 148; ^aGender: 0 = male, 1 = female; ^bEducational Level: 1 = diploma or lower, 2 = bachelor, 3 = master or higher; Average coefficient alpha internal reliabilities appear in parentheses; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table-2
Regression Results of Proactive Behaviors

Predictor or Statistic	Model 1 (Demographics)	Model 2 (Demographics + IT)
	Beta ^a	Beta ^a
Gender	-.048	-.045
Age	.137*	.126*
Educational Level	.203***	.190***
Job Tenure	-.119	-.134*
Institutional Tactics (IT)	-	-.153**
R ²	.057**	.080***
F Value	3.27**	3.74***
Incremental R ² (ΔR^2)	-	.023**
Incremental F (ΔF)	-	5.33**

^aStandardized Regression Coefficients; * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

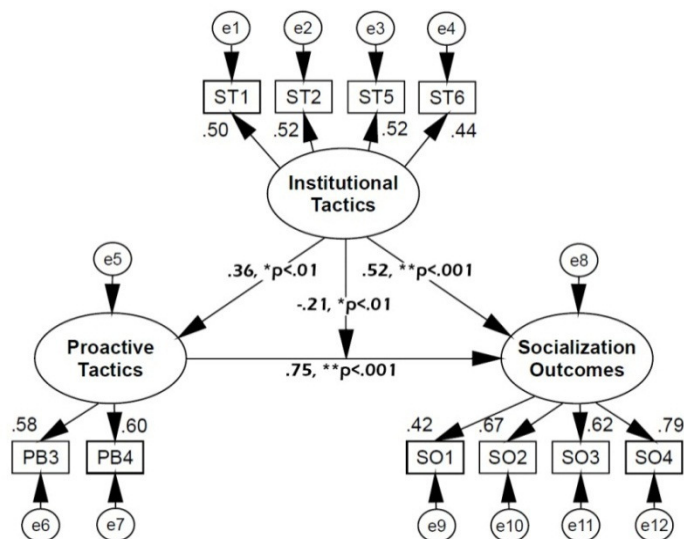


Figure-2

Structural model along with standardized coefficients

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that proactive socialization tactics relate positively to socialization outcomes which are consistent with similar previous studies^{4,6-8}. Newcomers who engage more frequently in a proactive behavior were more likely to report the positive outcomes. Among all the standardized beta weights, the strongest value was related to the relationship between proactive tactics and socialization outcomes indicating the more prominent role of proactivity than the institutional tactics in socialization process. However, the significant positive influence of institutional tactics on proactive tactics implies the initial role of organizational efforts for newcomers' proactivity.

The results also provide support for the moderation hypothesis, because the interaction term was significant and indicated a pattern consistent with our presupposition. Although, the institutional tactics provide a condition in which the newcomers engage in proactive behaviors in their early career but on the other hand, decrease the extent to which a newcomer's proactive efforts result in positive socialization outcomes to a considerable extent. That is, with the institutional socialization tactics held constant for a long time, the proactive behaviors explained less, yet still a significant amount of variance in role clarity, task mastery, social integration, and intention to remain. This provides empirical evidence for Griffin et al.'s interactive model⁷. In general, the results of this study extend the literature on socialization by demonstrating both the incremental and regressive role of organizational socialization tactics in socialization outcomes through newcomers' proactivity.

Implications for practice and research: The results of this study suggest several worthwhile points of view to consider for practice. Our results suggest that the organizations not only need to be aware of and responsive to newcomers' proactive behaviors, but also should consider the interaction of institutional and individual socialization tactics. In this regard,

the organizations might consider training insiders and socialization agents to respond positively to newcomers' proactive efforts⁶. In addition, organizations might ensure the provision of special opportunities for newcomers to be proactive²², as being the two of four proactive behaviors non-significant, implies the neglected role of proactivity in the under study organizations. It is evident that, both the institutional and individual socialization tactics are needed to socialization outcomes be high, but to proper socialize newcomers, the appropriate organizational tactics should be applied in appropriate time. As it can be seen in the research model, institutional tactics increase the proactivity while affects the relationship between proactive behaviors and socialization outcomes negatively. So, as a main result of this study we recommend the organizations to employ the socialization tactics only for a limited time in newcomers' early career. This certain time might take to the time in which newcomers become proactive otherwise; this could backfire if institutional tactics are continued for a long time.

According to results of the control analysis, it can be said that the organizations should employ institutional tactics more for newcomers with previous job experience and less for those who are older and more educated. Finally, in terms of regression weights can be said that the role clarity referred to above as the fourth dimension, further predicts the variance of socialization outcomes in comparison with the other dimensions. Thus, our final proposal to practitioners is to more clarify the newcomers' tasks and responsibilities compared to other socialization processes as well as investigating their different demands based on their individual differences.

In terms of research, our results suggest several areas to consider for future studies. Researchers might try to investigate the influence of institutional tactics on the antecedents of proactive behaviors instead of proactivity itself or enter both of them in the model simultaneously. For example, Parker et al. modeled the antecedents of proactive behavior at work¹¹. Along these lines, future research might examine what and how antecedents of proactivity are affected by institutional socialization tactics. One of these antecedents could be proactive personality alongside demographics for shaping individual differences framework to predict the proactive behaviors. In addition, the predicting and moderating role of institutional tactics can be divided among several sub-variables and be studied separately. In this regard, the grouping of Van Maanen and Schein²⁸ and Jones²¹ can be utilized that proposed respectively six and three factors to structure the socialization experience of newcomers.

Future research might also consider the important role of insiders and socialization agents for responding the newcomers' proactive efforts. In other words, the proactive outcomes could be studied as an intermediary variable to demonstrate its buffering role and the path by which proactive behaviors result in socialization outcomes. According to Saks et al., the extent to which newcomers' proactive efforts result in socialization outcomes probably depends on whether their efforts responded

by proper outcomes⁶. On this basis, it could be beneficial to study the simultaneous mediating and moderating role of proactive outcomes in relation to socialization outcomes.

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