A relational view of organizational socialization: Newcomers’ experiences of learning on the job.
Refereed paper

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**Abstract**

An important episode in workplace learning is the socialization of newly hired people into the organization quickly and effectively. Typically, the organization sciences literature conceptualizes the socialization of new employees as a learning process whereby the newcomer is responsible for learning to fit into the organization. Not only must newcomers learn the tasks of their jobs, they must also learn the procedures of the work group, the expectations of managers, and the culture of the organization. This perspective seems to underestimate the social influences of coworkers and managers. Social exchange theories (e.g., leader-member exchange) identify the quality of the relationships between supervisors and subordinates in organizations as a foundational dimension moderating the quality of other interactions, such as learning and working.

This paper explains the findings of a recent study of organizational socialization from a relational perspective describing compelling evidence that relationship building is a primary driver of the socialization process in organizations. Results of this qualitative, case study explore and explain the socialization process experienced by new engineers recently hired into a large, global manufacturing company based in the U.S. There were two primary findings: (a) relationship building was a primary driver of the socialization process and (b) the work group was the primary context for socialization. These findings indicated that the quality of relationships formed between the newcomer and his or her coworkers and managers mediated the quality of learning and integration into the organization. Furthermore, the quality of the socialization process experienced by newcomers varied by work group—from high to low. These findings provided the evidence used to elaborate current views of socialization into a relational view of socialization, along with implications for Human Resource Development.
Introduction

Recently asked what he wished he learned in school that would have helped him begin his new job more successfully, an engineer remarked that he wished someone had taught him how to play the “political game” better. During further investigation of this comment, he explained that his most difficult times adjusting to his new job were in learning how to interact effectively with others in his work group and in other groups. Interviews with several other engineers and managers indicated that the social dynamics of the workplace were the most troublesome aspect of the workplace for new hires.

The socialization of newcomers into organizations is a critical experience influencing what newcomers learn about their work, their level of satisfaction, how they perform, and potentially their level of commitment to the organization (Ostroff and Kozlowski 1992; Van Maanen and Schein 1979; Wanous 1992). The typical conceptualization of organizational socialization assigns primary responsibility to the newcomer to learn to fit in. Organizational tactics to facilitate socialization (if present) tend to focus on those that the organization believes will help the newcomer learn the tasks of his or her job and the expectations of the organization. Much of this information may be of little use to newcomers (Moreland, Levine, and McMinn 2001) and often overlooks or, at best, underestimates the influence of the social context immediately experienced by newcomers in their work groups.

To understand better how newcomers learned to work within the social system of the organization, this study investigated the socialization experiences of newly hired engineers into a large manufacturing organization. The findings indicated that building relationships was a primary driver of the socialization process and that the work group was the primary context for socialization. These findings suggested a reconceptualization of the typical views of organizational socialization.

This paper begins with a brief review of the theoretical framework guiding this study, along with its relevance to organizational socialization. The next section briefly describes the research design, questions, and methods, followed by a presentation and discussion of the major findings of the study leading to a new model of the socialization process. The paper concludes by providing some thoughts on the implications of this socialization model for Human Resource Development in organizations.

Review of the literature and theoretical framework

Three theoretical perspectives guided this investigation of the socialization of newly hired engineers: social cognition, social exchange, and relationship studies. While many researchers of socialization based their work on social cognitive theory (Saks and Ashforth 1997), few researchers employed the perspective of social exchange theory or the work on relationships. A brief review of each theoretical perspective follows.
Social cognition related to socialization

Many models of socialization describe stages through which newcomers pass as they become organizational members (Wanous 1992). Learning is a common thread throughout these models as newcomers learn specific job tasks and responsibilities, work-group procedures, management’s expectations, and the values and mission of the organization (Bauer, Morrison, and Callister 1998; Ostroff and Kozlowski 1992).

Recent developments in learning theory strive to present a broader view of learning by integrating cognitive, emotional, and social factors into an interdependent system (Illeris 2003; Yang 2003). For example, Illeris (2003) proposed a tripartite model of learning based on cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Similarly, Yang (2003) proposed a theory of learning explaining the interdependencies among domains of technical knowledge (what to do), practical knowledge (how to do it), and affectual knowledge (values, or why it is done this way). There is a useful correspondence between these broader views of learning and the requirements of learning in the socialization process as described by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), in other words, the newcomer needs to learn what to do, how to do it, and why it is done this way.

Encountering a novel situation (e.g., a new job) prompts newcomers to search for information to make sense of the situation (Louis 1980). This search often involves social and personal sources of information, as well as cognitive and affective factors in the learning process. Social cognition describes the interactive process by which newcomers acquire, encode, and retrieve information in an attempt to link the newcomer’s personal frame of reference with the collective frame of reference of a group (Bandura 2001; Louis 1980).

Viewing the socialization process strictly from a newcomer’s perspective and his or her responsibility to learn to fit into the organization underestimates important social and systemic influences on the newcomer’s learning process. Socialization is a complex process comprising multiple actors and interactions (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner 1994; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson 2006; Jones 1983; Morrison and Brantner 1992; Saks and Ashforth 1997).

Wanous (1992) proposed that increasing the level of interactions between the newcomer and his or her environment increased the success of socialization (Wanous 1992). However, it seems important to examine the quality of interactions—not just the level of activity. Increasing the wrong kind of interactivity might encourage the wrong kind of learning. The quality of interactions is a key dimension in social exchange theory.

Social exchange related to socialization

Social exchange theory describes a type of ongoing relationship between people (actors) as a series of interactions in which actors exchange resources guided by rules of exchange, e.g., social norms (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Recent theorizing has begun to expand social exchange theory beyond its behavioral and economic roots to include cognitive and affective constructs. For example, Lawler (2001) proposed an affective theory of social exchange that links emotions and sentiments to actors’ perceptions of fairness, satisfaction, solidarity, trust, leniency, and commitment to their exchange relationships. He identified emotions as mediators of the exchange process and found that positive or negative emotions generated by an exchange experience influenced future expectations for exchange.
Earlier, Graen (1986) described organizational roles as somewhat ill-defined, requiring individuals to negotiate and clarify roles through interactions (exchanges) between leaders and members. Leader-member exchange theory (a type of social exchange) states that work roles are developed and established gradually through a process of exchanges (or interacts) between a leader and member. The leader offers increased responsibility and membership benefits to the subordinate, and in return, the subordinate offers increased contribution and commitment to the work group. Leader-member relationships are unique to each individual dyad and may develop into high-quality relationships based on trust and respect or degenerate into low-quality relationships merely fulfilling the employment contract (Bauer and Green 1996).

An important finding from research on leader-member exchange theory shows that perceptions of a relationship often differ significantly between the leader and the member. Studies have shown a low correlation between subordinates’ and leaders’ perceptions of their relationship (Gerstner and Day 1997). This difference in perceptions might easily foster misperceptions, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations of events, exchanges, and expectations during the socialization process.

Once newcomers join the organization, relationships form quickly and tend to endure (Miner 2002). Thus, the initial interactions between newcomers and their work groups are extremely important, because they establish the quality of the relationship, which in turn affects the newcomers’ attitudes, satisfaction, and performance on the job.

**Relationships and socialization**

In addition to learning job tasks and procedures, most models of socialization identify a need for newcomers to learn to interact successfully with others in the organization. Despite the recognition of interpersonal behavior as one of the important domains of learning for newcomers, there is little explication of this domain in the socialization literature.

Relationships have been studied more thoroughly in social psychology (Fitness, Fletcher, and Overall 2003), communication studies (Villard and Whipple 1976), and education (Merriam and Caffarella 1999), than they have in organizational studies. These fields have identified key components and processes explaining the development of relationships between people. Relationships develop from the mutual interactions among people’s past expectations, their present experiences with others, and the context (Bandura 1986; Fitness, Fletcher, and Overall 2003).

Authors taking a social cognitive perspective identified key components of relationships as dimensions of attribution, attachment, and quality (Fitness, Fletcher, and Overall 2003); collaboration, support, and empathy (Merriam and Caffarella 1999); and inclusion, control, and affection (Villard and Whipple 1976). These relational views of social interaction assumed the reciprocal nature of relationship formation in a particular sociocultural context, as well as the influence of participants’ past experiences. For example, Fitness, Fletcher, and Overall (2003) described a cognitive model of relationship development comprising the events of the situation; personal cognitions based on idiosyncratic beliefs, expectations, and ideals; and the outcomes of the interactions between the individual’s cognitions and the situation. According to Fitness, Fletcher, and Overall (2003), the basis of an individual’s beliefs and expectations for a
relationship derives from his or her general theories of how and why relationships form, and how and why a particular relationship is forming as it is.

Specifically related to learning, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) reviewed the work of several authors proposing a relational view of the learning process. This work emphasized the importance of connectivity and stated that learning—especially in social contexts—depends on connecting one’s experiences and ideas with those of others. From this perspective, learning—especially in social contexts—depends on the quality of collaboration, mutual support, cooperation, and empathy among learners and instructors.

Villard and Whipple (1976) described the goals of relational communication as the individual’s needs for growth and social relatedness. They stated that an individual’s identity is highly dependent on social relationships. In their view, interpersonal relationships occur along a continuum between the extremes of one-time encounters on one end and intimate social relationships on the other. Encounters describe simple relationships in which the participants agree to focus on specific activities, such as work, conversation, or information gathering. At the other end of the continuum, intimate social relationships become more complex and personal—involving individuals’ identities and self-concepts. Work relationships typically fall somewhere between these extremes and affect the level of involvement expended by the individual, as well as the his or her work identity. For example, poor-quality relationships at work leave the individual feeling underappreciated, exploited, and excluded. (Villard and Whipple 1976).

People continuously negotiate their relationships with others along the dimensions of inclusion, control, and affection (Villard and Whipple 1976). The degree of inclusion felt by an individual leads to positive or negative feelings at work. Control describes the distribution of power in the relationship and affects positions of dominance or submission. Affection describes the caring aspect of relationships. In work settings, affection appears as qualities of liking or friendliness among workers and strongly affects individual work identities. High-quality relationships form from high levels of acceptance and support (inclusion), confirmation and empathy (affection), and shared control (Villard and Whipple 1976).

While several studies have examined the relationships among specific variables in the socialization process, Bauer, Morrison, and Callister (1998) stated that there has been little empirical work examining how these variables collectively interact to contribute to the socialization of the individual into the organization. Focusing too narrowly on the newcomer’s ability and responsibility to fit in may risk overlooking the powerful influences of the established social system on the success of the socialization process. For this reason, a broader view of socialization is necessary in which the organization, as well as the newcomer, shares responsibility for the success of the socialization process. This study investigated a wide range of experiences reported by 36 newly hired engineers and managers in a large global manufacturing organization in the U.S.

Research design

Based on the exploratory and descriptive intent of this study, it seemed most appropriate to conduct a qualitative inquiry. Several authors described a qualitative methodology as not only appropriate but also more likely to provide insights into complex social phenomena (Eisenhardt
and Graebner 2007; Patton 2002; Silverman 2005). Stake (1995) described qualitative case-study research as an appropriate design for acquiring an in-depth understanding of the complex interactions and functions of people in the context of a specific situation. Also, Yin (2003) described case-study designs as relevant strategies for research questions of how and why, as well as relevant strategies for research focused on contemporary events within a real-life context and in which the researcher had little to no control over events. Thus, the characteristics of this study (examining a complex social phenomenon in context) underscored the choice of qualitative case-study research design.

Research questions

This study addressed the question of how newly hired engineers learned the social expectations (norms) of the organization as they began new jobs. Preliminary investigations into the phenomenon of socialization through the literature and from initial interviews with practicing engineers and managers indicated that the socialization process was problematic—especially regarding the social influences of the workplace. Therefore, this study focused on the learning processes whereby new engineers (newcomers) learned the norms that governed how work was perceived and done in the organization. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do new engineers learn the social norms of the organization?
2. What are the factors influencing this learning process in the organization?

Sampling, data collection, and analysis

Following the logic of theoretical or purposeful sampling (Patton 2002; Strauss and Corbin 1998), the researchers identified individuals to interview for the purpose of collecting rich, in-depth information addressing the research questions. Three groups composed the sample:

- New grads: 17 newly hired engineers, recent graduates from higher education, first job out of school.
- Experienced hires: 13 newly hired engineers, previous job experience.
- Managers: six managers of work groups with newly hired engineers.

The interviews were semistructured, following the Critical Incidents Technique (Ellinger and Watkins 1998; Flanagan 1954; Gremler 2004). The interviewer asked each participant to describe how they learned the social norms of the organization or the way things were done there. Careful probing of their answers helped surface detailed and concrete descriptions of how they learned to do things and their perceptions of what was expected of them. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the transcriptions were verified with the original recordings.

The analysis of the text (data) followed qualitative analysis procedures recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). Four steps constituted the analysis process: (a) review the transcripts and attach predetermined codes to statements that described learning and interpersonal (social exchange) experiences; (b) retrieve all statements coded as learning and exchange experiences, and proceed to open-code (Strauss and Corbin 1998) these statements at a finer level of detail, staying close to the participants’ language; (c) sort the resulting open codes into thematic patterns and categories; and (d) identify the thematic patterns and categories forming from these data.
Findings

A predominant theme emerging from the texts of the interviews in this study was the critical importance of building good relationships with coworkers and managers in the organization. The quality of the relationships developing between the newcomer and members of the work group strongly influenced the learning process on the job. Furthermore, newcomers implied that the quality of their relationships with members of their work groups affected their levels of job satisfaction and reported perceptions of the company.

The evidence in this study supported the relational dimensions of inclusion, control, and affection described by Villard and Whipple (1976) and others. With little prompting, the participants in this study recounted their recognition of relationships and efforts to build them as an initial step toward becoming productive and integrated in the work group.

It’s like around here you’re going to run into a lot of people that are very laid back, and if they don’t think you’re [a] priority or your work’s priority, you’ll be on the back burner for a year on something. And so you’ll learn that you’ve really got to network and really learn people around here and really, really get to know them on a personal level and earn their respect. And respect them. 06-003.179

I think the biggest thing is to develop a good relationship with your coworkers. . . . Be understanding that it’s not their job to help you along, and so they have their own work that has to be done, yet they’re taking time out of their day to come over and walk you through this process. 06-004.228

Becoming productive for newcomers often depended on becoming an integral member of the group (inclusion). The degree of inclusion varied from group to group. Among the participants in this study, newcomers experienced various levels of quality relationships with their coworkers. The quality of relationships affected newcomers’ degree of closeness with others (inclusion) in the workgroup.

But it only took minutes before people would stop over and introduce themselves and say hi and ask -- do you want to go out to lunch? You want to go to volleyball after work? Very friendly people. I was just like instantly accepted as one of the group and that was that, and unexpected to me. 06-003.219

We really don’t work together on stuff. We technically do have to integrate the software pieces, and that’s difficult. It doesn’t work very well when we do that. We’re trying to integrate some of my newer design stuff now into another product that’s similar to the stability control, and it’s going very slow and very hard. 06-007-256

We all go on this trip together and being with the same people for that long, like 24 hours a day . . . going out to dinner and stuff and being in a social atmosphere with those people, it was the most remarkable thing. I actually, after that trip, I was like — I am part of this group. I’m not an outsider anymore. . . . And so we just kind of joke back and forth, and we just got to know each other, and I got to know more about how things work. 06-008.228
The following statements describe a unique situation in which a newcomer was physically separated from the rest of the group and then integrated a short time later.

[Before integration] And although they invited us into [the rest of the group], it’s hard to deal with, so we ended up kind of just not interacting very much with them. So we would suggest things at the group meetings if something comes up, but nothing really ... 06-002.339. [After integration] Now it’s much easier, you know them in a different way because you see them every day and you talk to them every day. You know their habits more; you know their likes and dislikes; you know their background more because you talk to them. And you find out that you have things in common, pretty much everybody, not the same things with everybody, but. ... And so you build a bond, like a coworker bond, that’s much stronger. 06-002.343

The relational dimension of control included such factors as collaboration, mutual support, and cooperation. Work groups demonstrated varying levels of these factors, which had strong effects on newcomers’ experiences and satisfaction. In one situation, a newcomer recalled a coworker’s resistance to his suggestions on a project: “Yeah. There’s some resistance because, like – [my coworker said] ‘why should I listen to you? I haven’t known you for many years. You’re not part of our group.’ ”

In another situation, a newcomer described another newcomer that violated the group’s sense of shared control:

If you have a question, just ask. And everyone’s there for each other; you don’t do things behind people’s back. ......We’re running into problems now where we have someone new to our group, and she just isn’t fitting because she just goes behind our backs and starts doing her own work like she’s in her own company or something, and we have no idea what she’s doing. And she’s mad at us because we’re — we don’t communicate enough. But all you have to do is ask; we’re sitting right next to you. 06-008.230

The third relational dimension discussed is affection, which comprises emotions and feelings. Affect is an important qualifier of relational schema influencing how people perceive and feel about their interpersonal actions (Baldwin, 1992). Again, the experiences of newcomers varied by work group from positive to negative levels of affection. For example:

I am extraordinarily happy to be working here. This is exactly what I was hoping that I’d be doing. Now, that being said, I can still be — you can love something and still not like it. So that’s where I am right now. I love what I’m doing; I wouldn’t trade this job for anything right now. Give it 10 years and see what happens. But some things could be easier. 06-022.138

Like other companies it’s like -- hey, let’s go to lunch. [They] Invite you and get you involved in the process. Here, nobody ever would say -- let’s go to lunch. Nobody would ever say -- hey, we’re meeting after work to do this. 06-007.146
Discussion

It became apparent that there was a wide range of socialization experiences for newcomers in this organization—from good to bad—primarily based on the quality of relationships they formed in their work groups. It was also apparent that whether newcomers could form high-quality relationships depended not only on the sociability of the newcomer but the willingness of others in the work group to form high-quality relationships with the newcomer. However, it must be noted that all this data came from the perceptions of newcomers—not coworkers.

The importance of interpersonal relations is very common in the literature on learning, social exchange, communities of practice, and teams. Billett (2004) described interpersonal relations in workplace learning as co-participation, which signified the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the learner and the social context of learning. Wenger (1998) defined learning as the transformation of knowing in practice and described the importance of mutual engagement, negotiation of meaning with others, and shared repertoires with the community. These views highlight an important mechanism for organizational socialization found in this study—relationship building.

Most newcomers described their learning experiences, through observation and participation, within the existing social structure of the work group. An important component of the social structure was a configuration of the various relationships in the work group. Kram (1985), Wenger (1998), and Brown and Duguid (1991) described the learning process in the workplace from similar perspectives influenced by a network or structure of social relationships. It is the various relationship structures within the work groups that mediated the socialization experiences reported by newcomers in this study.

While the literature on socialization recognizes the newcomer’s responsibility for learning to interact effectively with others in the organization, there is little mention of the effect of the others as mediators of learning and membership. There were several participants who reported that, despite their best efforts to relate to the group, they were treated continually as outsiders. Blantern and Anderson-Wallace (1995) described patterns of engagement as the context that takes on meaning and moderates many of the characteristics often attributed to individuals. They claimed that greater change is possible by focusing on the context or patterns of engagement (relationship structures) rather than on the individuals embedded in the patterns.

Wenger (1998) was very explicit about the mutuality of engagement in a community of practice and its affect on learning. In many ways, the work group represents a local community of practice for engineers in this study. Work groups varied in their history, the experiences and dispositions of the members, and in their practices toward work. Newcomers assigned to work groups that made efforts to interact and get to know them, included them in nonwork activities, and provided a meaningful assignment early on indicated higher levels of satisfaction and job performance, as well as positive attitudes toward the organization. In contrast, newcomers assigned to less relationally oriented work groups lamented their struggles to obtain access to critical information and procedures, lack of camaraderie with coworkers, and a negative perception of the organization. As Villard and Whipple (1976) stated, individuals experiencing low levels of support, inclusion, and affection tend to feel isolated, underappreciated, and
exploited. These negative themes ran throughout many of the experiences reported by newcomers in work groups offering little meaningful interaction.

In a relational view of organizations, the knowledge, work, and identity of individuals depend on the relationships among the members of the group. Individuals are embedded in this structure or pattern of relationships (Gergen, 2003). While it might seem obvious that there is an interdependency between the individual and others in the group, the tendency for organizations to focus narrowly on the capabilities of the newcomer to learn to fit and the content of the work belies the importance of the group’s effect on the newcomer. Research on feedback experiences has shown that the power of feedback relates more strongly to the interaction between people—not the information in the feedback (Bouwen and Hovelynck 1995).

High-quality relationships include high levels of trust, liking, autonomy, interaction, and responsibility (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995; Gerstner and Day 1997). They also include mutual responsibility for tasks and outcomes, mutual acknowledgement of each other’s position, and mutual understanding (including opportunities to question and confront). High-quality relationships appear as participatory, engaged interactions rather than as detached, disengaged interactions (Bouwen and Hovelynck 1995).

Organizational socialization is a process of identity formation as well as learning and the level of support and validation afforded newcomers by coworkers affects feelings of personal accomplishment, belonging, and commitment to the organization. Becoming a full member of the work group or community requires the deliberate effort of the incumbents in the group to reach out to newcomers and include them into the social system of the group.

Limitations of this study

Although this qualitative case study of newly hired engineers provides new insights into how newcomers learn on the job there are definite limitations to this study as well. First, this study focused on one organization, and the ability to generalize the findings from this organization to other organizations is speculative. In spite of this limitation, the focus on one organization helped reduce extraneous factors in the environment that could confound the data. Rather than the goal of generalizing the findings, the goal was to provide an authentic, in-depth exploration and explanation of the socialization process as experienced by a rather homogenous group of new hires in a large organizational setting.

Second, the data came from retrospective interviews with participants. While the interviewer asked participants to recount their experiences of learning occurring over the previous six to 12 months, it is very likely that important data was missed or distorted by memory or retrospective biases, as well as the difficulty of interpreting and describing complex intangible concepts. Interview techniques exist that researchers believe help minimize the problems with retrospective bias, and this study employed these techniques, such as focusing on specific examples rather than reflections upon general concepts, asking for elaboration, and focusing on experiences within the past year (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1990; Weiss 1994).

Triangulation of the data was another means the study aimed to increase the qualitative validity of the findings of this study. The newly hired engineers represented one perspective of
the socialization process in this organization, and I collected additional information from a cross-functional team of executives and researchers in the organization and from the managers of the work groups directly involved with the socialization process. Not only did these additional sources corroborate many of the findings derived from the data gathered from newcomers, they elaborated on the data—providing additional information about the context and intentions related to the socialization process in the organization. Also, various groups of scholars and practitioners reviewed the analysis process and findings as they emerged, offering additional observations and insights from several perspectives.

Implications for Human Resource Development

As shown by this study and supported in some of the literature on learning and interpersonal relations, the relational dynamics of the work group mediated the development of knowledge, expertise, and membership by newcomers in the organization (Schwandt, Ayvaz, and Gorman 2006). As a process for developing the expertise of newcomers, socialization is an important HRD process.

Traditional views of socialization and HRD tend to underestimate the influence of the dynamic social and relational processes among members of the work group. Considering that newcomers in this study reported primarily informal socialization processes, the important question for HRD, at least in this organization, is how well the various socialization processes employed by the work groups helped newcomers become productive, integrated members of the organization. As indicated by the data in this study, forming higher-quality relationships had positive effects on learning and integration into the work groups and the organization—although this strategy was not consistently applied among the work groups.

The implications of this study for a strategic perspective on HRD suggest that HRD scholars and practitioners identify and include in their models of learning and performance the relational structures and processes among members of work groups that form the context within which individual learning and performance operate in organizations. Schwandt, Ayvaz, and Gorman (2006) argued that the creation and utilization of knowledge depends on the specific structure of relationships and values found in the group. The collective nature of organizational work suggests that HRD scholars and practitioners attend to the collective dynamics (especially the relational dynamics) among members of the work group—not just the characteristics of individual members entering and working in organizations.

Socialization is an important development strategy for organizations looking to increase the capacity of their workforce, improve their competitive advantage, and develop future capabilities by bringing new talent into the organization. Recognizing that this talent develops under the strong influences of different relationship structures at the work group level suggests that the HRD processes in organizations attend to and foster positive relational group processes within which newcomers become members of the organization.

Garavan, Gunnigle, and Morley (2000) claim that a constructivist perspective expands the horizons of HRD beyond an individualistic and instrumental approach to learning and recognizes the important effects of the social construction of knowledge on the development of human resources in organizational settings. As described in the previous section, the social
factors driving the socialization process examined in this study took a more prominent role and demonstrated qualities better explained by a constructivist perspective.

More and more, scholars are expanding the functional orientation of HRD to include social perspectives and principles as described by social constructivists (Garavan, Gunnigle, and Morley 2000). The findings of this study indicate that current views of the socialization process may too narrowly conceptualize it as an individual learning process, effectively relegating relationship building to one of several domains the newcomer must master. The interpersonal domain in current socialization models tends to exist as an object of learning, rather than as a driver of the learning process. Changing the status of the social domain from object to driver recognizes the importance of social interaction and relational processes to the construction of knowledge by the newcomer and members of the work group.

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