Abstract

The socialization of an employee into a new role provides an opportunity for both the newcomer and the organization to maintain or improve current practices. In this paper, integrating ideas from a practice-based perspective with the concept of sensemaking, we draw on the multiple perspectives provided by the newcomer and relevant colleagues to examine the socialization process. Using an inductive, qualitative approach analyzing 21 semi-structured interviews in six organizations with four types of participant—newcomers, and their respective coworkers, managers, and human resources (HR) representatives—our findings shed light on how interactions between newcomers and these three types of insiders influence newcomers' enactment of organizational practices. Specifically, newcomers who received greater sensegiving from insiders had, in turn, more opportunity to sensetest their nascent understandings, and to sensemake using these inputs, leading to the replication of organizational practices. Conversely, newcomers with limited access to sensegiving were less able to sensetest, and instead relied more on previous experiences to make sense of their new environment, leading to the determination of practices. Newcomers with substantial prior work experience used this as a valuable input to sensemaking, allowing quasi-replication and determination of organizational practices that were more likely to be accepted, although not always. Our findings highlight social aspects of socialization as integral to sensemaking processes and performance of practice. In order to optimize socialization, all stakeholders – newcomers, their colleagues, and HR – should consider how the fundamentally social nature of socialization might require each party to adapt their approach.

KEYWORDS

newcomers, organizational socialization, practice, role transitions, sensegiving, sensemaking, sensetesting.

Introduction

Newcomer socialization is the process by which a newcomer transitions from being an "outsider to integrated and effective insider" (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006, p. 492). This occurs whenever an employee crosses an organizational boundary, such as starting in a new organization, being promoted, or moving sideways in the same organization. Newcomer socialization is an area of increasing significance; changes in patterns of employment see employees being more mobile, increasing the need to be productive as soon as possible, and potentially going through socialization many times in their careers (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). For the organization, recruiting, selecting, and training new employees is a material expense, hence the socialization of newcomers is a crucial process that, if executed effectively, leads to positive outcomes such as higher job performance and organizational renewal (Bauer et al., 2007; Danielson, 2004).

Socialization is, fundamentally, a learning process whereby newcomers make sense of their new environment (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2019; Klein & Heuser, 2008; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992) that involves not only the newcomers but also those surrounding them (Korte & Lin, 2013; Reichers, 1987). However, as Feldman (2012) notes, most research on the topic takes a narrow, quantitative approach, examining the influence of static variables on newcomers' learning and adjustment across proximal and distal time frames (Bauer et al., 2007). There are significant issues with such a limited approach. First, the predominant focus on how newcomers individually learn and adjust to their new environment obscures consideration of the collective nature of knowledge in organizations (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010). Second, focusing only on newcomers' adjustment fails to consider the broader impacts newcomers may have, including their effects on organizational processes (Scott & Myers, 2010). Third, more specifically, there has been a call to examine what is unique to the social aspects of socialization (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2019), as well as to further unpack the complexities of socialization from a practice perspective (Antonacopoulou & Pesqueux,

2010). This suggests the need to focus on interactions that help or hinder newcomers, that is, the social in socialization.

To address these issues, we apply a sensemaking framework to investigate newcomer socialization as a process of moving toward full participation in social practices (Orlikowski, 2010). We take a qualitative, practice-based approach to capture the interactions between newcomers and insiders that influence newcomers' performance of organization practices.

Theoretical foundation

Perspectives on newcomer socialization

Newcomer socialization is the process by which new employees learn about the role, responsibilities, and culture of the organization (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) proposes that learning results from interactions between the individual and their environment; and that employees make sense of their environment through both formal and informal sources, namely managers, colleagues, and organizational practices. During socialization, newcomers face uncertainty (Reio & Callahan, 2004; Saks & Ashforth, 1997), and this uncertainty is reduced as they learn information that helps them practice in ways that are congruent with organizational norms. This information may be provided to newcomers by organizational insiders, or they may take a proactive approach by seeking information that they need, developing new networks, and changing how work is done to facilitate their adjustment (Reio & Callahan, 2004; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Thus, newcomers have some ability to independently figure out how to behave acceptably and effectively in the new context.

The organization's actions also play a key role in newcomer adjustment. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) proposed six tactics organizations use to socialize new employees, that collectively range from institutionalized tactics (a structured socialization program, highly controlled by the organization, ultimately seeking to replicate the status quo) to individualized tactics (largely informal and lacking structure, encouraging the new employee

to proactively take responsibility for their own socialization, and innovate in how they perform their role). Individualized tactics that focus more on the newcomers' initiative may be by design, to give talented newcomers leeway to shine, or by default, because newcomers' needs have not been considered. Building on Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) research, Jones (1986) classified the socialization tactics into three categories of content, context, and social, and concluded that social tactics were particularly important in predicting role orientation and adjustment. Hence, the social side of socialization is crucial, is embedded in both institutionalized and individualized tactics, and transmitted through newcomers' colleagues. Subsequent research confirms newcomers' managers and coworkers' influence on newcomer adjustment, including increased social capital (Korte & Lin, 2013), organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Colleagues may be purposefully integrated in socialization processes, either with specific socialization responsibilities as mentors or buddies, or more broadly as managers and coworkers whose own work will influence the socialization of newcomers.

In his theory of work-role transitions, Nicholson (1984) proposes that newcomer adjustment involves two simultaneous processes: personal development and role development. Personal development describes the individual changing themselves to adapt to their new role and environment, such as adopting new values and learning new skills. Role development refers to the individual changing their role and environment to suit their strengths and needs, and may involve making changes to how work is done, with whom, and toward what task objectives. In keeping with our focus on newcomers' development of their role, we focus on the high and low role development side of the model. Where role development is low (and personal development is low), Nicholson terms this replication, with the newcomer reproducing established practice. In contrast, when role development is high (and personal development is low), Nicholson terms this determination, with the newcomer shaping their role to suit themselves. Notably, Nicholson's model includes both the

newcomer and the organization influencing role development. Thus, the newcomer brings

their motivations and prior experiences, and the organization provides socialization tactics

and a context that is more or less conducive to role development. In general, Nicholson aligns

institutionalized tactics with replication, with structured socialization experiences

encouraging newcomers to take a custodial approach to the practices relating to their role.

Conversely, individualized tactics provide more leeway for newcomers to proactively define

their practice, and Nicholson associates such tactics with determination (Nicholson, 1984;

Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

A practice-based perspective on newcomer socialization

Previous research has tended to ignore the complex, situated nature of newcomer

socialization. Adopting a practice-based approach allows a detailed examination of how

newcomers' participation in social practices enables learning how to perform in ways that

suit a particular context (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010). Social practices are taken to be

"embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared

practical understanding" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11). Practices are social because participating in

practice involves encountering and coexisting with others, and sharing norms and

understandings. Thus, practices represent socially established, interdependent ways of doing

things (de Certeau, 1984). From a practice perspective, socialization not only integrates the

newcomer to allow the continued smooth functioning of the organization, but also

acknowledges new employees can bring new ways of practicing, because the replication of

practice is seldom exact (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010; Danielson, 2004).

Newcomers become socialized through participating in practice, leading to situated

knowing which is inextricably linked to the people and context in which learning occurred.

People are capable of changing and adapting practices, yet practice theories of socialization

lack detail about why or how people do this (Fox, 2000). Specifically, newcomers are capable

of both conforming to current practice, that is replication, and of adapting practice to suit

them, that is determination (Nicholson, 1984). Antonacopoulou and Güttel (2010) note that

further attention, within socialization research, should be given to newcomer practice.

Sensemaking, sensegiving and sensetesting

Our approach draws on sensemaking theory (Smerek, 2011; Weick, 1995), which

integrates the underlying cognitive processes of newcomers with the contextual influences

affecting practice. Sensemaking is well-suited to investigating newcomer socialization, where

newcomers are faced with a new role and organizational environment and must figure out a

reasonable interpretation of their new context as a basis for action (Louis, 1980; Weick,

Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Disruptions, such as surprises, contrasts, and unmet

expectations, are the starting point for sensemaking processes during socialization (Louis,

1980). To fully make sense of their new environment, newcomers must participate in

organizational practices, leading to situated knowing (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Maitlis &

Christianson, 2014).

Sensemaking comprises three activities: creation, interpretation, and enactment

(Weick, 1995). Creation involves formulating an initial sense of the situation which affords a

basis for interpretation, and in turn provides a foundation for action. These processes occur

iteratively until a coherent and reliable understanding of the environment is achieved.

Sensemaking may be aimed at creation, interpretation, and enactment that replicates current

practice; or it may, either purposefully or accidentally, determine practice as the newcomer

acts to make sense of their new context. Sensemaking is ongoing and updated continually to

integrate new experiences and ensure that understanding provides a reliable basis for action

(Smerek, 2011).

Two processes complementary to sensemaking have been proposed: sensegiving and

sensetesting. Sensegiving is conducted by others in the environment—and thus for

newcomers it would be insiders across the organization—and refers to "the process of

attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a

preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). As such, sensemaking and sensegiving are distinct processes, with newcomers conducting sensemaking and insider colleagues providing sensegiving. These processes are interdependent, and each potentially incomplete without the other (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Socialization research has identified colleagues' sensegiving behaviors as playing a vital role in shaping newcomers' interpretations of novel situations (Korte & Lin, 2013). Thus, insiders can support maintenance of the organization's status quo or innovation through their actions towards newcomers (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Sensetesting is conducted by individuals during the sensemaking process. More specifically, sensetesting is an intervening process whereby people check their sensemaking either before or after enactment, and gather feedback that enables learning (Smith, Dufour, & Erakovic, 2011). Thus, sensetesting is a reflexive process, whereby people examine their assumptions and understandings through practice (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Feedback from the success or failure of practice performance drives learning and future behavior (Danielson, 2004). To date, sensetesting has not been examined during socialization.

In summary, newcomer socialization that enables full participation in practice relies on an iterative process of newcomer sensemaking. In this, newcomer sensemaking is aided by organizational insiders who grant or deny access to practice, and shape the sensemaking of newcomers through both sensegiving behaviors, and their availability, or not, for sensetesting. These ongoing processes result in the newcomer replicating and/or determining practice. The research questions for this study are therefore:

1. What processes of sensemaking, sensegiving, and sensetesting are used by newcomers, their organizational managers, coworkers, and HR representatives?

2. How do these processes influence newcomers in replicating or determining practice?

Research design

Data collection

Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, allowing a balance of uniformity alongside unearthing unique aspects of participants' experiences (Patton, 1990). An interview protocol provided an outline, but was used flexibly to allow the interviewer and interviewee to explore points of interest. We interviewed newcomer employees as well as three other parties: coworkers, supervisors, and HR representatives. Coworkers were chosen as having a close view of newcomers' practices and being highly influential sources for newcomers (Korte & Lin, 2013). Managers are a key source of information for newcomers to understand required performance practice standards, and would be likely to monitor newcomers' practice alignment against expectations (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Finally, HR provides resources to support newcomer adjustment, and may be monitoring newcomers to evaluate how well they are adjusting, and if and when more support is needed (Saks & Gruman, 2014). For newcomers, the questions asked about their socialization experiences, how the process unfolded (e.g., "Can you please describe in general terms the socialization process or induction you went through at this organization"), how they sought to learn (e.g., "What was the most important source of information for developing your skills and knowledge?"), found out how things were done (e.g., " In what ways did you find out how things are done around here?"), and relationships and insights from colleagues (e.g., "What are the most important relationships you have formed at work here?"). Similar and complementary questions were asked of the other types of interviewees, for example, the socialization process from their perspective, and their responsibilities in newcomer socialization (e.g., "In general, what role do you see yourself playing in newcomer's socialization?").

Participants

Data were collected from organizations in New Zealand. Socialization is a process that is potentially influenced by perceptions of power distance. New Zealand is a country with low power distance (Hofstede Insights, n.d.; Kock, Parente, & Verville, 2008), meaning that people are viewed as relatively equal even in higher status contexts, including organizational hierarchies. In the context of socialization, this suggests that New Zealand newcomers may be more comfortable in engaging with their managers and even more senior colleagues. This might enable newcomers to more proactively pursue their socialization, both in replicating and, particularly, in determining practice.

We used a purposive sampling strategy at both the organizational and individual participant levels, intentionally selecting aspects that might provide unique perspectives (Patton, 1990). For purposive sampling at the organizational level, we invited organizations of different types to participate: small versus large; private versus public ownership; and multi-national versus domestic. We also wanted to represent a diverse range of industries and job levels in our study, hence we chose six different types of organization, and graduate, entry level, and experienced newcomers. For Organizations 1 through 5, HR contacts in these organizations were asked to identify and invite four types of employee to participate in this study: a newcomer, a coworker of the newcomer, the manager of the newcomer, and a trainer or HR representative involved with the newcomer's socialization, representing the social milieu surrounding the newcomer (Weick et al., 2005).

Contrasting with the institutionalized socialization tactics in other participant organizations in this study, we considered it valuable to include a newcomer experiencing only individualized socialization tactics. This had the potential to provide a contrast, or polar type (Pettigrew, 1990), that could yield unique insights regarding exclusion from the practices of the organization. However, organizations employing an individualized approach, leaving the newcomer to proactively take responsibility for their own socialization, may be

reluctant to provide research access that would document and discuss this. Thus, in order to understand newcomers' individualized socialization experiences, access may need to be obtained through individual newcomers, rather than the organization. Hence, for the newcomer at Organization 6, our approach represented purposive sampling at the individual level. Through the authors' networks, we identified a newcomer, "Eve", who was experiencing an isolated socialization. When the interview was conducted, Eve confirmed that there were no colleagues, manager, or HR representative who would be relevant to interview, as none had provided meaningful input into her socialization. Due to this, we did not think it was ethical to approach anyone else in Eve's workplace to participate in this research. As further evidence for an individualized socialization process, during the interview Eve noted the following: after she had met her manager when she was hired, she did not meet him again until four months after she started in the role; nobody informed her when to start her new role and nobody met her on her first day; she was provided with no training or information about essential aspects of her role; and she had no key to the office she was allocated for the first three months in her role, instead having to borrow a key from the secretary. Respecting Eve's views, we did not seek to gain other perspectives on her socialization. We highlight that this does not compromise our study's aim, which was to understand different and potentially overlapping perspectives on socialization, but not to compare these perspectives directly. Therefore, using a different approach for one participant, Eve, without the other perspectives at Organization 6, does not undermine the integrity or coherence of our findings or the method that produced them, and serves to enhance our understanding of an individualized socialization experience.

Organization 1 was a multinational manufacturing company with 45 employees, and an experienced newcomer. Organization 2 was a multinational finance company with 55 employees, and a graduate newcomer. Organization 3 was a multinational engineering company with 80 employees, and a graduate newcomer. Organization 4 was a national

private education institute with 100 employees, and an entry level newcomer. Organization 5 was a national government agency with 3,250 employees, and an experienced newcomer. Organization 6 was a national public education institute with 5,000 employees, and an experienced newcomer.

Across these six organizations, we interviewed 21 people: six newcomers, six coworkers, five managers, and four HR representatives. All newcomers were women, not by design but due to who responded to the invitation to participate. Lou from Organization 1 was a senior customer service representative (50-55 years of age with 20 years' experience), Kel from Organization 2 was an accountant (20-25 years of age with 6 months' experience), Kay from Organization 3 was an engineer (20-25 years of age with 3 months' experience), Ann from Organization 4 was a receptionist (20-25 years of age with 7 months' experience), Mel from Organization 5 was a senior manager (50-55 years of age with over 30 years' experience), and Eve from Organization 6 was an academic (25-30 years of age with 3 years' experience). Two of the five managers were women (Organizations 2 and 3). Three of the four HR representatives were women (Organizations 2, 3, and 4). Three of the six coworkers were women (Organizations 2, 3, and 5). Interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms were used to protect anonymity. From Organizations 1, 2, 3, and 4, there were complete sets of all four types of participant (newcomer, coworker, manager, HR representative), such that these interviewees could provide neighboring perspectives on the same newcomer's socialization process. From Organization 5, due to the unavailability of the HR representative, an additional coworker was interviewed. As previously mentioned, from Organization 6 we interviewed one newcomer only, Eve.

Data Analysis

Template analysis was used to interrogate the data. Template analysis is a type of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) whereby analysts specify *a priori* codes emerging from the literature. Template analysis has been used in previous research on socialization

(Sang, Ison, Dainty, & Powell, 2009). The first author, in consultation with the second author and the research literature, drafted an initial coding template which was refined during the analysis of all 21 interviews. After coding a small subset of the data, the template was iteratively refined, providing the codes and structure for analysis of subsequent transcripts (King, 2004). We began with the constructs of sensemaking by the newcomer, sensegiving by insiders, and sensetesting by the newcomer, which have been identified in the literature (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick et al., 2005). We separated these three into replication of practice (newcomers adhering to established actions and norms; Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010), and determination of practice (newcomers creating their own practices; Orlikowski, 2002) to provide six initial codes, expanding our coding from this foundation. Each transcript was coded separately, using a constant comparative method between different interviews (sources of data) and different types of interviewee (newcomer, coworker, manager, or HR representative) to detect patterns of concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The transcripts were initially coded by the first author. The transcripts and the coding were made available to the other authors; after repeated coding by all authors, review, and discussion, adjustments were made. Our final coding template is shown in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Findings

Our findings support newcomers, through their socialization process, engaging in both replication and determination of organizational practices. Figure 1 provides an overview of our results. This depicts the role of prior work experience as a resource for newcomers in their sensemaking. The other input is the socialization tactics from the organization, provided via insiders. Where tactics were institutionalized, with structure and a clear role for insiders in guiding newcomers, insiders engaged in sensegiving. In contrast, when tactics were individualized, insiders provided considerably less sensegiving, with this restriction indicated by the thinner arrow from individualized tactics. The central part of the model shows the

iterative processes of sensemaking, sensetesting, and sensegiving. The ultimate outcome is

how newcomers engage in performance of organizational practices, ranging from replication

to determination; notably this is a continuum, with adaptations of practice possible between

these two extremes. We explain the elements of the model in more detail below.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Replication of practice

There were two key areas of influence in the replication of organizational practices:

newcomers' prior experience, and access to organizational insiders. Newcomers with

previous experience in a similar role or context were able draw on this experience to

accurately interpret and make sense of their new environment. In keeping with the key role of

social interaction in situated learning, institutionalized socialization provided newcomers

greater access to organizational insiders, and consequently sensegiving from insiders and

opportunities for sensetesting by newcomers. Sensegiving endowed newcomers with situated

knowing, largely leading to replication of practice. Through sensetesting, newcomers

evaluated if their sensemaking, and ensuing practice, matched organization norms.

Sensemaking during replication of practice.

Leveraging prior experience to understand practice. More experienced newcomers

had the benefit of established knowledge and skills that assisted their sensemaking. This in

turn enabled their replication of current practices, either exactly or close enough to be

acceptable to insiders.

Having worked in the environment she knew pretty much what we do, how those

people operate. (Guy, Coworker, Organization 5)

Just the ways of working and the ways of thinking. It was familiar, so for me to step

into that environment straight away, I could have just been in a different station in the

UK. (Mel, Newcomer, Organization 5)

Helpful access to organizational insiders. Coworkers and managers were key sources of information enabling replication. Their inputs helped newcomers appreciate the broader culture of the organization within which practices were situated, and understand the specifics of how practices were performed.

Asking questions of insiders. Asking questions was one vital way for newcomers to learn, and was frequently mentioned by all interviewees as the most valuable newcomer action.

> If she wasn't there I would go to Jay. And his door was always open. He said "If you're unsure, just ask." (Lou, Newcomer, Organization 1).

> If we had any questions with anything, even if it has nothing to do with our role, we'd just ask them. (Ann, Newcomer, Organization 4).

Observing insiders. In addition to actively inquiring, newcomers also observed what colleagues were doing. This enabled newcomers to replicate practice based on observed performance.

> And I just said to her, I said "I'll just sit in behind you and just ask you questions as to what you're doing, and why you're doing it." And I got a book and I just wrote it all up. (Lou, Newcomer, Organization 1)

> We just watch them and then we just copy what they were doing. So that's how we learnt. (Ann, Newcomer, Organization 4)

Sensegiving during replication of practice

During replication of practice, insiders engaged in sensegiving behaviors that guided newcomers on the practices of the organization. Graduate newcomers tended to experience a more structured, institutionalized socialization including systematic sensegiving by insiders; this resulted in a custodial approach to the role, replicating current practices. Even in roles where the newcomer was experienced, as in Organizations 1 and 5, there was an expectation that at least some of the newcomers' practices would be congruent with the current practices

of the organization. If the newcomer deviated too much, insiders would often try to reinstate a version of current practice, that is quasi-replication, rather than allow determination of practices. Thus, sensegiving by insiders at times acted as a barrier to innovation.

Insiders preferring the status quo. For graduate newcomers in particular, insiders provided a more orderly, institutionalized socialization experience with the aim of replication. Structured sensegiving by insiders tended to result in a custodial approach to the role that maintained current practices.

> Because, we have a bit of a formulaic way of doing our work, and young graduates will learn it really quickly, we're probably a little bit rigid. We'd rather people just did it our way. (Jill, Manager, Organization 2)

> You get someone saying, "Oh in our old job we did it this way," and you say "That's fine, but here we do it this way because…" and I give her the reasons why and she thought, "Oh, okay. I understand that now." (Jay, Manager, Organization 1)

Insiders showing current practice. Vital sensegiving behaviors for insiders involved showing newcomers "how things are done around here", allowing newcomers access to organizational practices, and enabling situated learning. These sensegiving behaviors implicitly supported replication of practice.

> With the more junior staff, for instance, I would sit with them, I'll work through from the top to the bottom, and explain as I go along. (Sam, Coworker, Organization 2)

> I explained to her the tasks that she needed to do…time frames…some information and told her who was going to check it. (Dan, Manager, Organization 3)

Sensetesting during replication of practice

During replication of practice, newcomers included the feedback loop of sensetesting, checking their interpretation and enactment of their underlying sensemaking. Such sensetesting relied on access to helpful insiders who were willing to provide feedback as to whether newcomers' understandings and actions were congruent with current practices.

Newcomers also employed sensetesting to alleviate some of their uncertainty and anxiety about their new role and environment.

Newcomers checking their understanding of practice. The feedback loop from sensemaking through sensetesting and sensegiving allowed newcomers to adjust their practice to be acceptable to insiders, thus facilitating the newcomer journey from outsider to insider.

> I was just quite unsure sometimes, because there's probably a standard that the higher up people want. I would double check with them a lot. I really enjoy it if there's a net to catch me. (Kay, Newcomer, Organization 3)

> I've learnt a lot about different techniques for teaching which has been very good…it was quite a steep learning curve actually…I don't think it was something that was deliberately forced on me…but it was something I felt I had to do in order to meet the standards. (Eve, Newcomer, Organization 6)

Newcomers adjusting practice based on sensetesting. There was evidence that some newcomers deliberately sensetested to figure out appropriate practice and then revised their sensemaking enactment.

> And if I'm doing something, I go "Jay?", and he'll come round and he'll go, "Do this" and "Go around this way" or "Delete the whole thing and we'll restart it." (Lou, Newcomer, Organization 1)

Even experienced newcomers recognized that at least some of their practices should be consistent with the usual practices of the organization.

> When I got my leadership assignments in, I asked [my academic colleague] whether she agreed with the marking…so I had to bump up the bottom [marks]. (Eve, Newcomer, Organization 6)

Determining organizational practices

Experienced newcomers were more likely to have an individualized socialization experience than graduate or inexperienced newcomers. Individualized socialization is more likely to result in determination of practice because, as noted previously, role development can only occur in an environment that is conducive, or at least not obstructive, to newcomers using their previous experience, skills, and knowledge to innovate. Newcomers determined practice when either they did not have access to the practices of the organization, or they saw possibilities for improvement in practices. In such instances, newcomers drew on their past knowledge of alternative practices to shape current practices, often with positive consequences. A different, unreceptive context, or a newcomer lacking prior experience, may not have achieved these innovations.

Sensemaking during determination of practice.

Sensemaking during determination of practice was hallmarked by an absence of input from insiders, which deliberately or unintentionally enabled determination. When newcomers lacked basic information on practices due to restricted access to insiders, they had to figure practices out for themselves, which was often a trial and error process.

Newcomers figuring it out. Those newcomers who went through a more unstructured, individualized socialization experience often found themselves lacking vital information about the practices of the organization, and having to sensemake with deficient inputs.

Through searching through all the [organization's] things, I've found that there's actually an induction booklet. I found it by accident a couple of weeks ago. (Mel, Newcomer, Organization 5)

There was no handbook, there's no way of knowing anything…you're trying to figure out how an entire system works and you haven't even been told what the system is or what it looks like. (Eve, Newcomer, Organization 6)

Utilizing prior experience to determine practice. During an individualized socialization experience, due to a combination of inadequate information about the practices of the organization and a desire to implement good practices, newcomers drew on their own previous skills, experience, and knowledge to enact practice.

Using prior experience to enact the environment. More experienced newcomers brought with them a sense of how their workplace should be, and influenced the context accordingly.

> You get the odd client that comes in and is yelling at the boys…And he'll go outside and I will turn around and say to the boys, "Don't you ever let anybody talk to you like that!" (Lou, Newcomer, Organization 1)

> Comments have been, "We've never had an advocate for us before." But once I get the bit between my teeth, I want to make sure [something] does change. (Mel, Newcomer, Organization 5)

Adjusting practices to achieve improved processes. As well as trying to change their context, experienced newcomers drew on their previous experience to improve organizational practices.

> We didn't give her as much support as we probably could have...she's gone out and found all the resources and information. She's trying to develop our [employees]… nothing has ever been done like that here previously. (Lee, Manager, Organization 5)

> I've already changed a few of the procedures…because you know you sort of sit back and look at it and go, "No, that's not right. There is a simpler way of doing it," and I did it. (Lou, Newcomer, Organization 1)

Sensegiving during determination of practice

Sensegiving during determination of practice was limited, especially for experienced newcomers. The lack of sensegiving behaviors was at times purposeful, as experienced hires were seen as needing less support. However, at times it appeared to be due to negligence,

with insiders apparently unconcerned at the difficulty newcomers faced when they lacked

opportunities to check their sensemaking. Either way, it meant confident newcomers who

brought knowledge of practice from other contexts felt less pressure to preserve the status

quo. Thus, they introduced new practices, although the receptiveness of insiders varied.

Purposefully giving rein to newcomers. At times, those newcomers who had relevant

prior experience and a high level of skills and knowledge experienced a more hands-off,

individualized socialization. The justification from insiders was that experienced newcomers

did not require as much input or attention, as they could make sense and figure out practice

on their own, and this could potentially benefit the organization.

> But because she had the background…we actually took a real hands-off approach with
>
> her because of her previous experience…I've got to see how proactive she is and the
>
> fact that she can work on her own. So she's just proved herself to me. (Lee, Manager,
>
> Organization 5)
>
> I emailed [a colleague] and said, "I need to get these data sets in order," and she was
>
> like, "Oh, there's no way you're going to have time to do that now"…I just made a
>
> virtual data set; it was a surprise. And then I suddenly realized, I'm all by myself with
>
> this. (Eve, Newcomer, Organization 6)

Inattentive neglect of newcomers. Not all individualized socialization experiences

were the result of a deliberate strategy by organizational insiders. In some instances, there

was a marked neglect of the newcomer, with insiders showing a lack of care and attention,

resulting in an absence of direct interactions to provide sensegiving and access to

organizational practices. Where newcomers lacked information their sensemaking was

unreliable, and they found themselves surprised when their practice was deficient.

> I didn't hear all of the instructions and he never really explained to me what the
>
> whole purpose of the project was…so, I didn't really know what was going on, why I
>
> needed to do it. (Kay, Newcomer, Organization 4)

Nobody had told me [that two projects were due at the same time]. So that was a

shock. And it was more of a shock that nobody had bothered to tell me. (Eve,

Newcomer, Organization 6)

Sensetesting during determination of practice.

Sensetesting relies on access to insiders to provide a sounding board. As the

comments below demonstrate, newcomers who had a more individualized socialization

experience lacked insiders for sensetesting, and were subsequently unsure of their role

boundaries and the extent to which they could and should determine practice. Sometimes

determination of practice seemed to work, although newcomers who lacked feedback

remained uncertain. At other times, newcomers only realized that determination failed when

they received negative feedback, with unacceptable practices rejected by insiders.

Uncertainty about role boundaries. Newcomers who were unable to sensetest their

understandings with organizational insiders could not gain a coherent sense of their role and

environment, which hindered their ability to determine practice. An inability to sensetest

engendered a sense of uncertainty, with newcomers unsure about the limitations of the

environment on changing practices, and whether any attempts to determine practice would be

accepted or rejected by insiders.

And I didn't change the assessments because I didn't know whether I was allowed to.

(Eve, Newcomer, Organization 6)

I feel uncomfortable that there wasn't something...that's probably just the way they do

things but that's not to say that's the right way of doing things; it's for me to assess and

look into it. (Mel, Newcomer, Organization 5)

Insiders supporting determination. Unlike replication, where newcomers were able

to sensetest their understandings and interpretations of practice, during determination of

practice sensetesting was not always possible. Instead, newcomers sensetested with insiders

afterwards to see if their determination of practice was accepted or rejected. Newcomers with

previous work experience were more likely to have new practices accepted than graduate

newcomers, likely due to their repository of prior knowledge which contributed to more

accurate sensemaking, in turn providing a better foundation for determination of practice.

> Lou...just changed [a process] without even saying anything to me…and I said "Why
>
> did you do that?"…and she gave me the reasons why, I just looked at her and said
>
> "Fine, that's good." (Jay, Manager, Organization 1)
>
> I've turned it from a, "Nothing really changes here" to "Maybe we can change it, sort
>
> of thing, a little bit". And even then stalwarts, who said, "No, I'm not changing how I
>
> do things"… [later] they've said, "Actually, that's a good idea." (Mel, Newcomer,
>
> Organization 5)

Insiders rejecting determination. Determination was not always accepted by

organizational insiders. When insiders rejected determination, newcomers then had to change

their behavior to act in a way that was more consistent with organizational norms.

> Something happened, that Mel said, "You are not to do this"; this guy went ahead and
>
> did it anyway and then she got a bit… I would have thought heavy-handed in her
>
> response to it... I just said "Mel, we don't do things quite like that, what we would or
>
> what I would do is go down and do this, what do you think?"…But when I told her
>
> how I would have done it, because I didn't want to tell her this is how she should do it,
>
> she just said okay. (Lee, Manager, Organization 5)
>
> He didn't have time to check it until he was about to hand it in, and then when he saw
>
> it, I think he got a little bit annoyed at me. I just had to redo it as quickly as I possibly
>
> could. (Kay, Newcomer, Organization 3)

Discussion

Our research explores the processes of newcomer sensemaking and enactment of

practice through investigating the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. This highlights the

role of dynamic interactions between newcomers and insiders as contributing to the

replication or determination of practice, with the potential for mutual adjustment of both newcomers and their colleagues. Thus we highlight social aspects of socialization as integral to sensemaking processes and performance of practices.

Looking at our findings in more detail, our approach foregrounds alternative perspectives on newcomers' interactions, allowing us to examine different influences on newcomers' practice. The dynamics of the socialization process were captured using a sensemaking framework, with evidence for feedback loops between sensegiving by insider colleagues and both sensemaking and sensetesting by newcomers. Through such iterative processes, newcomers were able to replicate or determine organizational practices.

Drawing on Figure 1, which broadly encapsulates our findings, organizations varied in their tactics between institutionalized and individualized socialization. Institutionalized socialization represents a structured and well-planned process in which insiders support and direct newcomers (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This enabled a continuation of the status quo through replication of practice. At the other end of the continuum, individualized socialization occurred, in which insiders provided little input, and thus newcomers had more latitude for innovation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Notably, individualized socialization could vary from being purposeful, such as when a manager allowed a newcomer freedom to determine practice, or neglectful, due to a lack of sensegiving by insiders which meant newcomers lacked knowledge of normative practices and were forced to innovate.

Our findings support Antonacopoulou and Güttel's (2010) assertions that socialization involves newcomers both replicating and determining organizational practices. Past research has focused predominantly on the integration of newcomers into organizations (Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song, 2013), including replication of organizational practices (Antonacopoulou & Pesqueux, 2010). Our findings reveal that newcomers also determine practice (Nicholson, 1984), drawing on their previous experience. Thus, socialization should not be viewed as a process of insiders assimilating the new employee,

but rather as a complex and fluid process that involves interactions between the newcomer and insiders, that iteratively influence organizational practices. Importantly, this supports insiders' key roles in socialization (Korte & Lin, 2013), allowing or denying access to practice via sensegiving behaviors, and providing the platform for sensetesting by newcomers.

Past research on newcomer socialization has only occasionally investigated the influence of previous experience on newcomers' socialization, primarily in quantitative studies (Adkins, 1995; Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006). Yet in these studies, prior experience has been an important factor, for example affecting task performance and retention. Our findings revealed prior experience being a key resource guiding newcomers' practice. This was often out of necessity, when newcomers lacked access to organizational insiders' practices, which restricted both sensegiving and sensetesting opportunities. More experienced newcomers enacted a wider range of practices, ranging from replication to determination according to the situation in which they found themselves.

Newcomer sensetesting was valuable to newcomers, allowing them to discern how well they understood and implemented organizational practices. Previous research reveals new employees, who are also new to the workforce, in general have less confidence when faced with uncertainty (Korte et al., 2019). Hence, sensetesting was especially valuable for less experienced newcomers, who wanted to check their intended replication of practice met expectations. For more experienced newcomers, sensetesting served to check the acceptability of both replication and determination of practice.

Insiders did not always make themselves available through providing sensegiving and opportunities for sensetesting. The most extreme case of this was the newcomer, Eve, who indicated there were no insiders who assisted her that would be suitable to interview, although her comments show a more mixed picture of neglect and feedback. This is consistent with research showing newcomers are not always welcomed, and may have a

tough time during organizational entry (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Despite knowing

that sharing their knowledge is beneficial for the team and the organization, many employees

are reluctant to do so, which can be due to the personal costs, such as time required

(Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012). Moreover, insiders may be strategic in the

knowledege they share, for example, they may provide only the bare minimum of

information, in turn creating a future opportunity to prove themselves as experts when the

newcomer returns to ask for more assistance (Connelly et al., 2012). Thus, the sensemaking

process can occur suboptimally, with newcomers relying heavily on the information they can

glean and make sense of.

Determination of practice is potentially valuable to organizations, although as noted

above, our findings show it is not always welcomed by insiders (Adler & Kwon, 2013). Over

time, and as people and their work environments change, practices evolve (Weick, 1995),

with determination of practice potentially accelerating this process. Thus, newcomers in

particular contribute to an organization's "becoming", with organizations being in a constant

state of emergence based on human action (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002).

Implications for theory and practice

This research has implications for all stakeholders: newcomers, their coworkers and

managers, and HR. One of the newcomers' main challenges is to find a "pathway to

participation" (Filstad & McManus, 2011, p. 777) to allow practice replication and

determination. One such pathway is via informal learning through relationships with

colleagues. Both newcomers and insiders should be encouraged to develop relationships

through social activities, such as going for coffee or lunch together, chatting at the "water

cooler", or getting involved in external social events (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006;

Korte et al., 2019). Newcomers may need encouragement to proactively initiate opportunities

to build relationships in the workplace (Ashford & Black, 1996), with both coworker and

manager support enabling proactive behavior (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). This support

could be in the form of providing active and positive encouragement, or giving useful

information to the newcomer that helps them navigate their new environment (Vinokur & van

Ryn, 1993). In addition to these activities, HR practitioners and managers should seek to

provide high quality interaction opportunities, as frequent, positive interactions with their

immediate manager are essential for effective newcomer socialization (Kammeyer-Mueller et

al., 2013). Managers should schedule regular one-on-one meetings with new employees;

these could be varied between formal meetings to discuss task progress, and informal

meetings over coffee to discuss integration into the role and organization (Cooper-Thomas et

al., 2019).

As the work environment and technology can enable or constrain sensemaking, to

encourage interaction and learning HR should, where possible, physically locate newcomers

amongst employees in similar jobs and identify useful local mentors, assigning to them the

task of assisting the newcomer (Hatmaker, 2014; Korte, Brunhaver, & Sheppard, 2015). A

local mentor or buddy will assist the newcomer learn not only the formal tasks and

responsibilities of their role, but also the unwritten organizational politics and policies, and

social norms (Korte et al., 2019). Managers can structure tasks to be interdependent, thus

promoting productive interaction between insiders and newcomers as they work together to

achieve common goals (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006).

Organizational socialization is a key part of strategic human resource management

(Saks & Gruman, 2014). Providing a highly structured socialization experience supports

replication, whereas a more individualized socialization encourages determination. HR

should carefully consider the benefits and risks of both replication, which may impede

innovation and growth opportunities, and determination, which may disrupt effective

practices (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). In such decisions, there is a balance between the needs of

the organization, and the needs and capabilities of employees, including newcomers who

flourish when they feel welcomed, supported, and empowered (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010).

In line with the value of sensetesting revealed in our findings, past research has found that both inexperienced and experienced employees value positive feedback cues from the organization, and particularly from their direct managers (Ashford, 1993). Ideally then, newcomers would enter an environment where it is the norm to give and receive constructive feedback on a regular basis with the aim of continual improvement (Knesek, 2015). Our findings show that even though experienced newcomers were more likely to determine practice, when they lacked opportunities to sensetest, they remained uncertain of their success, leaving them on the outside. A feedback-rich environment would prevent this, aiding newcomers to feel welcomed and supported in their new roles (Knesek, 2015).

Limitations and recommendations for future research

We focus on three limitations in particular. First, while we had good reasons to use interviews, this approach relies on the accuracy of participants' memories (Alvesson, 2003). Moreover, participants may have been responding in a socially desirable manner to provide a more positive impression of themselves and their organization (Alvesson, 2003). However, most interviewees provided detailed descriptions, and several provided negative or unflattering accounts of their actions, the socialization process, or their organization. Therefore, accuracy and impression management did not appear to restrict accounts.

Second, there was an absence of HR in the seminal interactions influencing sensemaking and practices, hence the lack of relevant quotes presented in this paper. Indeed, we did go back multiple times over the HR interviewees' data to check on this. The lack of relevant HR insights may reflect a range of factors, including a neglect of socialization by HR practitioners in general (Saks & Gruman, 2014); the stronger influence of colleagues than HR during socialization (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010); or it may be that the organizations

sampled in this study did not incorporate socialization strongly into HR practices, thus HR practitioners were bystanders to the socialization process, rather than being integral to it.

Third, all of our newcomer participants were women. Therefore, for newcomers, we have only captured women's experiences accessing the practices of the organization. While this is a limitation, it contrasts with other qualitative research on newcomers with samples where men predominate (Cooper-Thomas, Anderson, & Cash, 2012; Korte & Lin, 2013). Based on the similarity-attraction effect (Byrne, 1971), whereby people are more drawn to building relationships with similar others, women newcomers may have more easily gained access to the practices of the other women in the organization. Mitigating this, our other participants were a mix of men and women (coworkers: 50% women; managers: 40% women; HR: 75% women).

Our study opens interesting avenues for further investigation. Drawing on the limitation noted above regarding the relative absence of HR in our themes, future research should purposively investigate organizations where HR is expected to have a stronger role in socialization. This would reveal when and how HR can have a role, and how this relates to replication or determination of practice. In particular, socialization is linked to organizational effectiveness, and thus is a key component of a high performance work system (HPWS; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Thus, it would be informative to compare organizations with and without a HPWS to evaluate the extent to which a HPWS influences the socialization process from the perspective of all parties.

Given the central role of insiders during socialization, further research should delve into issues of power and politics underlying their motivations and behaviors. Our investigation across six New Zealand workplaces potentially shows stronger evidence of determination due to low power distance (Hofstede Insights, n.d.; Kock et al., 2008). Further research could explore the concept of power during socialization, and especially for newcomer's replication and determination of practice, across countries with different and

especially high levels of power distance. Additionally, insiders can be deliberately unhelpful to newcomers (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013), and this was echoed in our study with at least one newcomer, Eve, believing she received no insider support. Additional research could elucidate the reasons behind insiders' decisions to either support or hinder newcomers' socialization through providing or withholding sensegiving and sensetesting opportunities (Connelly et al., 2012), contributing to a more complete picture of the constraints and facilitators of socialization.

Our finding that newcomers do achieve determination of practice opens up further possibilities for research. It would be valuable to investigate the circumstances under which newcomers can achieve change through determination of organizational practices, and whether there are boundaries on the kind of practice that insiders allow newcomers to determine. An additional issue is how and who resolves the conflict between replication and determination of organizational practices (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010). For example, when newcomers are brought into their organization to be agents of change, often at higher status or seniority (Conger & Fishel, 2007), how is a balance achieved between enabling them to determine practices that invigorate the organization while replicating practices that sustain the organization?

Conclusion

In this study, our aim was to integrate a sensemaking framework and practice perspective to explore newcomer socialization. Our findings elucidate the iterative sensemaking processes occurring through interactions between newcomers and insiders. Sensetesting and sensegiving are reliant on insiders, who vary in their input. These two processes complement sensemaking and provide a basis for newcomers to replicate and/or determine organizational practices. Additionally, prior experience was a key resource for newcomer sensemaking, and in turn, practice. Our findings emphasize the fluid and emergent nature of socialization, and highlight the fundamentally social nature of socialization.

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Tables

Table 1. *Coding structure*

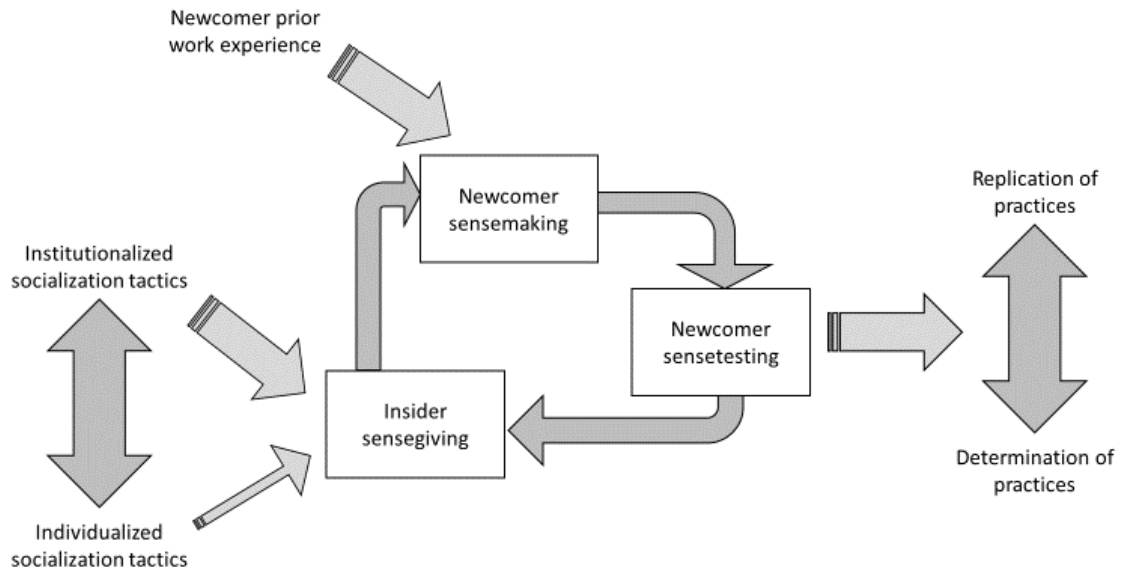|		
Replication of practice		
Sensemaking during replication	Leveraging prior experience to understand practice	
	Helpful access to organizational insiders	Asking questions of insiders
		Observing insiders
Sensegiving during replication	Insiders preferring the status quo	
	Insiders showing current practice	
Sensetesting during replication	Newcomers checking their understanding of practice	
	Newcomers adjusting practice based on sensetesting	
Determination of practice		
Sensemaking during determination	Newcomers figuring it out	
	Utilizing prior experience to determine practice	Using prior experience to enact the environment
		Adjusting practices to achieve improved processes
Sensegiving during determination	Purposefully giving rein to newcomers	
	Inattentive neglect of newcomers	
Sensetesting during determination	Uncertainty about role boundaries	
	Insiders supporting determination	
	Insiders rejecting determination	

Figures

Figure 1. Model of socialization through sensemaking, sensegiving, and sensetesting.