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## Augmentative versus compensatory? How context shapes the impacts of general socializing on newcomer engagement

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### ABSTRACT

Newcomer relationship-building behaviors are usually considered beneficial. However, after closer inspection of past studies, the results were mixed. In this paper, we start to unpack these mixed effects by focusing on newcomer general socializing (i.e., building social connections by attending workplace events). Specifically, we investigate when newcomer general socializing is more or less beneficial for newcomer engagement by proposing two contrasting views: (1) applying conservation of resources theory, we argue general socializing increases engagement under high serial tactics, providing an augmentative effect; (2) utilizing attachment theory, we argue general socializing enhances engagement under low serial tactics, enabling a compensatory effect. Unexpectedly, neither an augmentative nor a compensatory effect was supported in Study 1 (China). To explain these results, we extend our investigation by including task interdependence as a boundary condition and test our predictions in Study 2 (Australia). The results of Study 2 support the compensatory effect: When newcomers experience low serial tactics under low task interdependence, general socializing enhances emotional engagement. However, general socializing is detrimental to cognitive engagement when newcomers experience high serial tactics under low task interdependence. Our research contributes to theory and provides insights to HR on how to tailor onboarding interventions to optimize newcomer engagement.

### KEYWORDS

Newcomer adjustment; organizational socialization; proactive behavior; general socializing; workplace events; engagement

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## Introduction

Organizational socialization is an essential process, involving organizational tactics and HR initiatives to facilitate newcomers' transition from outsiders to insiders (Bauer et al., 2007; Reichers, 1987). Throughout this process, newcomers are provided with opportunities to build connections with insiders, which contributes to newcomer adjustment (Boulamatsi et al., 2024), learning (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016), social integration (Nasr et al., 2019), and intentions to stay (Saks et al., 2011). To help newcomers meet insiders and build relationships, many companies invest resources in designing and offering various interventions and social events (e.g., Google: Noogler program; Meta: Newcomer bootcamp; Netflix: 'Welcome Home' onboarding). Relatedly, newcomers' proactive behaviors of attending workplace social gatherings are referred to as general socializing (Ashford & Black, 1996). Consistent with Ashford and Black's (1996) conceptualization, we define general socializing as newcomer proactive behaviors of building social connections by attending workplace events, such as office parties.

Past research has shown that general socializing is the most consistent predictor of a range of benefits, including learning and well-being (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014), social acceptance and perceived fit (Bauer et al., 2025). However, as emphasized by Saks and Gruman (2012), despite the importance of social interactions for newcomers to build relationships with insiders, we still know relatively little about 'when certain socialization practices should be provided to newcomers' (p. 43). Consistent with this view, Bauer et al. (2025) in their recent meta-analytic review recommended adopting an interactionist perspective to explore how newcomers' social interactions with others impact the success of their adjustment.

Additionally, from a practical standpoint, there has been a growing trend of flexible remote work and e-socialization (Saks & Gruman, 2021). If workplace social gatherings are online, newcomers may find it more challenging to interact and proactively build social connections. Moreover, in an era of resource constraints and in light of the significant costs of onboarding and training, HR practitioners may wish to know whether it is more valuable to invest resources in workplace parties versus allocating such resources to offer training for experienced employees to improve their mentoring of newcomers. Our research could offer valuable insights on when to use certain resources, thus optimizing the value of HRM investments. Accordingly, we see research needs and practical benefits from understanding how and when socialization resources provided can effectively facilitate newcomer adjustment.

Scholars have argued that when organizations fail to provide helpful socialization resources, such as neglecting to offer institutionalized tactics (i.e., formal, supportive, and structured tactics), newcomer proactivity becomes more critical (e.g., Griffin et al., 2000). Relatedly, Fang et al.

(2017) found that newcomers who lack vertical ties with high-status members can still achieve social integration with strong horizontal ties with peers, as the strong horizontal ties have a compensatory effect. Similarly, Ou et al. (2018) identified that newcomers compensate for their lack of effective relationships with supervisors by receiving support from colleagues, improving their perceptions of insider status and social adjustment. These studies emphasize the compensatory effects of newcomer proactive behaviors and peer support in making up for a shortfall in the organization's efforts and the lack of access to or support from senior members.

A closer examination, however, reveals inconsistency and complexity in the empirical findings. For example, Kim et al. (2005, p. 239) hypothesized a compensatory effect, arguing that 'some proactive behaviors can replace, rather than harmonize with, institutional socialization tactics', but surprisingly discovered that general socializing amplified the positive impacts of institutionalized socialization on perceived fit. Kim et al. attributed this unexpected finding to sociocultural factors, with their study situated in South Korea, and called for a more comprehensive investigation to discover how and when newcomer proactivity influences adjustment, including investigating different countries. Similarly, a more recent study by Yuan et al. (2020) conducted in China found that, under institutionalized tactics that reflect supportive HR practices, newcomers' strong friendship ties with team members are more likely to facilitate their friendship centrality and further positively influence task performance.

This mixed evidence means our understanding of the functions of newcomer proactivity remains unclear. Clarifying this puzzle is important, as understanding when newcomer proactivity is more effective can help newcomers better utilize their resources to address their new role demands and enable HR practitioners to tailor initiatives to maximize the return on their investment in onboarding. Therefore, in line with an interactionist viewpoint (e.g., Bauer et al., 2025; Fang et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2005; Reichers, 1987), we incorporate the moderating effects of organizational (i.e., serial tactics) and structural factors (i.e., task interdependence) into the investigation of the impacts of the newcomer proactive behavior of general socializing. Specifically, serial tactics refer to the social aspect of institutional tactics, with experienced insiders being available and willing to show newcomers how to perform their roles (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Task interdependence refers to the requirement to coordinate with colleagues to perform and complete tasks (Pearce & Gregersen, 1991).

We focus on the emotional and cognitive facets of engagement as the key socialization outcomes. Emotional engagement is characterized by a positive emotional state and excitement towards one's work; cognitive engagement pertains to cognitive attention and absorption in work tasks

(Rich et al., 2010). The primary reason behind this choice is due to the importance of employee engagement for organizational competitive strategy (Saks, 2022) and its relevance to successful social interactions, where individuals can experience ‘high’ energy that comes from feeling connected to others who can provide emotional support and information to facilitate cognitive processes (Collins, 2004).

To address the interaction of general socializing and serial tactics, we develop a 2 by 2 matrix representing four categories to generate a theoretical understanding of the different combinations of actions (see Figure 1). We name these quadrants guidance-focused connecting, extensive integrating, unguided isolating, and secure-base developing. Based on the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018) that people are motivated to accumulate resources, we suggest newcomers are more likely to achieve emotional and cognitive engagement under the categories of extensive integrating (reflecting the augmentative effect of general socializing under high serial tactics) and secure-base developing (reflecting the compensatory effect of general socializing offsetting the negative impact of low serial tactics). We further argue that task interdependence is a critical boundary condition influencing the extent to which serial tactics moderate the relationships between general socializing and newcomer engagement.

## Theoretical background and hypotheses

### *Newcomer general socializing*

Given the significance of newcomers’ interactions with insiders for developing social capital (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018) and achieving

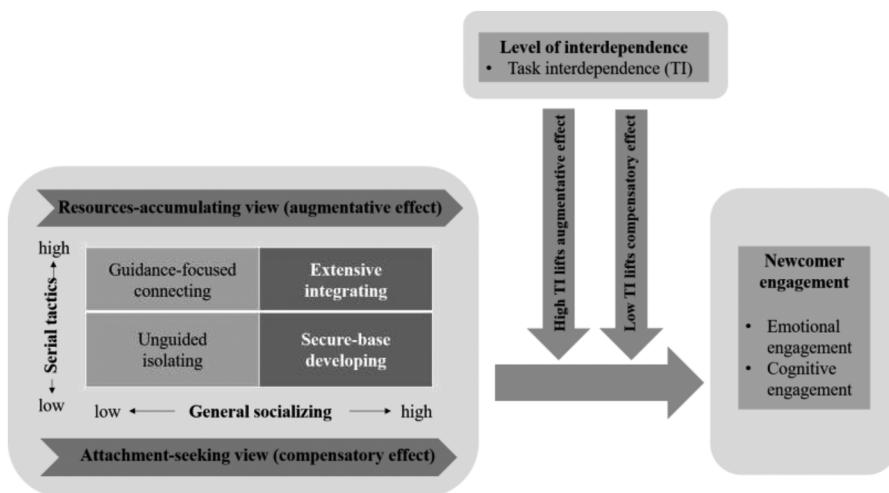


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

social integration (Yu & Davis, 2016), scholars have gone beyond the traditional focus on newcomer proactive behaviors such as information-seeking and directed their attention toward the effectiveness of relationship-building behaviors (Boulamatsi et al., 2024). Here, we explore one type of newcomer relationship-building behavior: general socializing (Ashford & Black, 1996; Zhao et al., 2023).

To frame our research within the existing socialization literature and establish the inconsistent augmentative versus compensatory effects of resources, we reviewed prior studies on newcomer general socializing (see [online supplemental materials](#)). On the one hand, some studies find an augmentative function of general socializing for newcomers experiencing a supportive environment. For example, Kim et al. (2005) found positive effects of general socializing on newcomer person-organization fit under institutionalized tactics. Similarly, Saks et al. (2011) discovered a stronger positive association between general socializing and social integration for newcomers who successfully developed relationships with coworkers. On the other hand, several studies reveal a compensatory function of general socializing for newcomers experiencing challenging circumstances. For example, Bauer et al. (2019) found that general socializing is important for newcomers only under conditions of low servant leadership, but with no effects under high servant leadership. Similarly, Yu and Davis (2016) showed that newcomers engaged in more general socializing to promote social integration when job autonomy did not align with their needs. Differing from both, a third set of findings shows null effects, with general socializing failing to predict socialization outcomes (Finkelstein et al., 2003). Null findings may reflect a positive or a negative relationship that varies depending on different levels of one or more moderators. Overall, these mixed augmentative, compensatory, and null findings suggest further investigation to clarify when general socializing is effective (Griffin et al., 2000; Nasr et al., 2019).

### ***The moderating role of serial tactics***

In terms of the organization's actions, prior studies have demonstrated that different organizational socialization tactics exhibit diverse impacts on newcomer adjustment outcomes (e.g., Kim & Moon, 2021; Montani et al., 2019), with socially-oriented tactics having stronger effects (Saks et al., 2007). Given that general socializing is within the scope of social connections, we are particularly interested in exploring the moderating role of these socially oriented organizational socialization tactics. Specifically, we investigate support from insiders *via* serial tactics. Under serial tactics, experienced colleagues act as role models or mentors, and thus are available and willing to show newcomers how to perform their

roles (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Serial tactics range across a continuum, with high serial tactics referring to newcomers feeling they have helpful and supportive insider colleagues. In contrast, the opposite end is called disjunctive tactics (low serial tactics), characterized by newcomers feeling that they have been left to figure things out for themselves (Jones, 1986). Serial tactics are associated with greater job satisfaction and social integration (Bauer et al., 2007; Saks et al., 2007).

To better understand why mixed effects of general socializing have been found, we propose two contrasting views: a resources-accumulating view based on COR theory and an attachment-seeking view based on attachment theory, as depicted in the left part of Figure 1.

### ***COR theory: an augmentative effect via resource accumulation***

COR theory has advanced theoretical understanding of employees' behavior and well-being (Hobfoll, 2011; Hobfoll et al., 2018). According to COR, individuals aim to accumulate resources, and those with more resources deploy them to acquire further resources while resisting resource loss (Hobfoll, 2011). Ellis et al. (2015) used COR theory to explain how various newcomer resources facilitate adjustment, dividing resources into personal, relational, and structural categories. Personal resources are newcomer characteristics that enable positive adjustment; thus, they reside with the individual newcomer and include personality, perceptions, and behaviors. Thus, we categorize newcomers' general socializing as a personal resource.

Importantly, Ellis et al. (2015) noted that the broader socialization context may influence newcomers' effective deployment of personal resources. They define relational resources as contextual elements that support newcomers' social integration and acceptance. Hence, we explore the moderating role of serial tactics, reflecting a relational resource. We argue that when newcomers experience high serial tactics, general socializing is more likely to elicit engagement through stimulating opportunities to build connections with colleagues (i.e., extensive integrating) than solely relying on serial tactics (i.e., guidance-focused connecting).

Serial tactics reflect a supportive social environment, providing newcomers access to experienced insiders. Under serial tactics, newcomers can observe and learn from experienced members, which helps to reduce uncertainty (Jones, 1986). Prior research shows that supervisors and other insiders can facilitate newcomers' information acquisition (Kim & Moon, 2021), social capital development and networking ability (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2018), and promote cooperative interdependence (Lu & Tjosvold, 2013). Therefore, due to high serial tactics enabling uncertainty reduction, newcomers using general socializing may gain more resources

through the augmentative effects of feeling confident to engage in workplace social events, alongside having support from experienced insiders. Such positive experiences can stimulate newcomers' intellectual curiosity to learn as well as information sharing.

On the other hand, when newcomers receive little guidance or support from experienced insiders under low serial tactics, they are left alone to learn the ropes themselves. In this situation, newcomers may experience difficulties understanding workplace expectations and social norms (Saks et al., 2007; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Without access to referent guidance, newcomers may find it hard to evaluate their competencies and fit within the group. The uncertainties associated with a new work setting may also make newcomers feel psychologically insecure; in turn, newcomers may be more cautious about expressing their views. Therefore, although newcomers proactively attend workplace events *via* general socializing, establishing meaningful connections with other insiders may prove to be challenging. Such difficulties can cause uneasiness, drain energy through the challenge of interpreting social cues, and lead to disengagement.

**Hypothesis 1:** Serial tactics moderate the relationships between general socializing and (a) emotional engagement and (b) cognitive engagement. Specifically, these relationships will be positive for newcomers who experience high serial tactics and negative for newcomers who experience low serial tactics.

### ***Attachment theory: a compensatory effect via attachment-seeking***

A contrasting, compensatory perspective comes from attachment theory, which Bowlby (1988, p. 11) described as the concept of having another person acting as a secure base, who is 'available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary'. In work contexts, organizational events can trigger attachment responses (Yip et al., 2018). Exploring these ideas further, significant insiders can act as attachment figures for newcomers by providing a secure base from which to act (Dong et al., 2024). Such insiders offer guidance and support (Nasr et al., 2019) and serve as role models (Ellis et al., 2015).

However, when newcomers experience low serial tactics with little access to experienced members, the absence of such a secure base may intensify feelings of frustration and uncertainty, increasing the likelihood of attachment-seeking behavior (Bowlby, 1982); Nelson & Quick, 1991). In this situation, newcomers may compensate for the lack of resources by using general socializing to proactively seek social validation from others and develop a sense of connection (i.e., secure-base developing). Alternatively, if newcomers experience low serial tactics yet avoid general

socializing (i.e., unguided isolating), they may face anxiety and work-related loneliness, which can adversely impact their adjustment.

In contrast, if newcomers experience high serial tactics, with willing insiders acting as mentors or role models to show them how to perform job roles, the positive effect of general socializing may become less apparent for two reasons. First, supportive socialization tactics have been shown to promote the development of cooperation networks (Jiang et al., 2022). In particular, serial tactics enable newcomers to build social bonds with helpful insiders and experience a sense of acceptance (Nasr et al., 2019). As noted by Tews and Stafford (2020, p. 224), 'knowledge that a supportive person is available and responsive provides an increased sense of security in a risky environment'. Therefore, serial tactics may lessen the need for newcomers' general socializing. Second, although formal or informal social events enable social interactions to help establish connections, newcomers may have to choose between general socializing and completing tasks that demonstrate their competence. If newcomers have already built ties with insiders under high serial tactics and thus have a clear understanding of expectations and social norms, the additional time and efforts of general socializing may be considered distracting or even irrelevant to their needs.

**Hypothesis 2:** Serial tactics moderate the relationships between general socializing and (a) emotional engagement and (b) cognitive engagement. Specifically, the relationships will be positive for newcomers who experience low serial tactics and negative for newcomers who experience high serial tactics.

### ***Study 1: the moderating role of serial tactics***

#### ***Methods***

***Research procedure and sample.*** Data were collected from newcomers working in one of China's largest food manufacturing organizations. Two HR officers assisted in distributing an online Qualtrics survey link to 164 newcomers at the headquarters and 1,167 newcomers across all branches in China. The survey was voluntary and anonymous, with no company access to data. A comprehensive consulting report was provided to the company, with suggestions to improve current onboarding practices. Altogether, we received 532 responses with a response rate of 40%. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 55 years, with a mean age of 29.8; the average organizational tenure was 6.9 months; over half of the respondents were male (55%); and 70% reported having a college degree or above.

***Measures.*** We used validated measures and translated all items into Chinese, following Brislin's (1986) guidelines. Respondents answered all the items on a 5-point scale, which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

agree), except for general socializing, where the endpoints were 1 (never) and 5 (always).

*General socializing.* We used a 3-item measure of general socializing developed by Ashford and Black (1996). An example item is ‘Participated in work social events to meet people?’ Cronbach’s alpha was 0.88.

*Serial tactics.* We adopted three items from Jones (1986) scale. An example item is, ‘I have received little guidance from experienced organizational members as to how I should perform my job’ (R). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.70.

*Newcomer engagement.* All engagement items were taken from Rich et al. (2010). We used three items to measure emotional engagement. An example item is ‘I am excited about my job’. Cronbach’s alpha was .90. We also used three items to measure cognitive engagement. An example item is ‘I pay a lot of attention to my job’. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.88.

*Control variables.* In line with prior organizational socialization literature (e.g., Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016), we controlled for the effects of newcomer gender, age, education, and tenure on engagement.

### Study 1 results

The means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alpha, and correlation among the variables in Study 1 are shown in Table 1. Cronbach’s alpha of the four variables ranged from 0.70 to 0.90, indicating the scales have achieved adequate reliability.

We follow the four-step procedure for testing interaction effects of latent variables using latent moderated structural equations (LMS, Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000) as recommended by Cheung et al. (2021). The LMS approach is superior to the regression approach because the former accounts for measurement errors when estimating the parameters, providing unbiased estimates and confidence intervals (Cheung et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, Cronbach’s alpha and correlation matrix among variables in Study 1.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Gender	–							
2 Age	.05	–						
3 Education	.08	.01	–					
4 Tenure	.08	.04	–.05	–				
5 General Socializing	–.16**	–.05	–.14**	.01	(.88)			
6 Serial Tactics	.04	–.06	–.11*	–.03	.16**	(.70)		
7 Emotional Engagement	–.10	.12**	–.18**	–.03	.33**	.19**	(.90)	
8 Cognitive Engagement	–.12*	.13**	–.16**	–.03	.28**	.19**	.76**	(.88)
MEAN	0.45	29.83	3.20	6.94	3.36	3.47	4.44	4.49
S.D.	0.50	6.03	1.46	2.86	0.97	1.04	0.69	0.61

Note:  $N=532$ . General socializing, serial tactics, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement were measured on 5-point scales. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

All models were estimated with Mplus 8.10 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2023) using the full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimator, a common and appropriate practice in estimating model parameters from data with missing values (Cheung et al., 2021). Following Hair et al. (2014, p. 584), we considered models with comparative fit index (CFI) higher than 0.92, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) lower than 0.08, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) less than 0.09 fit the data adequately.

The first step is to run a confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the quality of the measurements. The fit indices of the measurement model (Model 1) are  $\chi^2$  with 83 degrees of freedom ( $df$ ) = 182.22, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.047, and SRMR = 0.038, indicating our model fits the data well. All standardized factor loadings are significant and above 0.6, which provides evidence for convergent validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair et al., 2014). Table 1 shows that our variables have achieved adequate discriminant validity since the 95% confidence intervals of all correlation coefficients do not include 1, and the highest correlation is less than 0.85 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The highest correlation among the variables is between emotional engagement and cognitive engagement, with a value of 0.76. Since both emotional and cognitive engagement are dependent variables, multicollinearity is not a concern.

Step 2 is to estimate the models without latent interactions. We first ran the model (Model 2A) with only the effects of control variables on emotional and cognitive engagement, followed by the model (Model 2B) that added the main effects of general socializing and serial tactics on emotional and cognitive engagement. The fit indices of Model 2B are  $\chi^2$  with 81  $df$  = 176.43, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.047, and SRMR = 0.033, indicating Model 2B fits the data well. The estimated parameters are shown in Table 2. We proceed to step 3 by estimating a model (Model 3) with the interaction effect between general socializing and serial tactics on emotional and cognitive engagement. Following Cheung et al. (2021), we calculated the loglikelihood value difference between Model 3 and Model 2B. The Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-square difference is not statistically significant (TRd = 1.46 with 2  $df$ ,  $p$  = 0.46), indicating that including the interaction effects in Model 3 does not improve model fit significantly. Results of Model 3 in Table 2 show that the interaction effects between general socializing and serial tactics on emotional engagement ( $b$  = -0.11,  $p$  = 0.318) and cognitive engagement ( $b$  = -0.04,  $p$  = 0.501) are not statistically significant. Hence, neither H1 nor H2 is supported. However, the main effects of general socializing on emotional engagement ( $b$  = 0.19,  $p$  < 0.001) and cognitive engagement ( $b$  = 0.15,  $p$  < 0.001) are statistically significant, and so are the effects of serial tactics ( $b$  = 0.18,  $p$  < 0.001 on emotional engagement and  $b$  = 0.14,  $p$  < 0.001 on cognitive

**Table 2.** Estimated regression coefficients of the analytical model in Study 1.

Predictor	Emotional Engagement			Cognitive Engagement		
	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 3	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 3
Gender	-.101 (.057)/-.079	-.063 (.056)/-.049	-.084 (.058)/-.065	-.117* (.049)/-.112	-.088 (.047)/-.084	-.097* (.049)/-.092
Age	.156** (.050)/.147	.182*** (.048)/.172	.186*** (.048)/.175	.132*** (.039)/.153	.153*** (.039)/.177	.154*** (.040)/.178
Education	-.080*** (.020)/-.183	-.053** (.019)/-.121	-.047* (.020)/-.106	-.058*** (.017)/-.163	-.037* (.016)/-.103	-.034* (.017)/-.096
Tenure	-.005 (.011)/-.024	-.005 (.010)/-.023	-.005 (.010)/-.024	-.008 (.009)/-.041	-.007 (.008)/-.039	-.007 (.008)/-.041
General Socializing		.186*** (.036)/.270	.192*** (.038)/.274		.143*** (.029)/.253	.147*** (.031)/.257
Serial Tactics		.177*** (.048)/.202	.214** (.078)/.247		.144*** (.043)/.201	.156** (.055)/.221
General Socializing × Serial Tactics			-.107 (.107)/-.113			-.042 (.062)/-.054
R <sup>2</sup>	.062	.190	.230	.064	.183	.198
R <sup>2</sup> change		.128	.040		.119	.015

N=532. Coefficients are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors)/standardized coefficients. Age was divided by 10 to achieve a variance comparable to other variables to improve the model fit. \* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

engagement). Since the interaction effects are not statistically significant, we did not proceed to Step 4 to probe the interaction effects.

### ***Study 1 discussion***

The results support the positive main effects of general socializing and serial tactics on newcomer engagement. However, the hypothesized two-way interaction effects were not statistically significant, indicating that neither the resources accumulating view (augmentative effect) nor the attachment-seeking view (compensatory effect) was supported in Study 1. This result may be because data came from a food manufacturing organization where most tasks were routine, making the moderating effect of serial tactics (e.g., mentoring) less evident. Also, Study 1 was conducted in China, a country characterized by a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2001), emphasizing tightly knit communities (Kitayama & Salvador, 2024). In China, ‘acceptance as an in-group member’ is indeed crucial for Chinese newcomers’ social adjustment (Ou et al., 2018, p. 486). Attending social events can fulfil the psychological needs of developing a sense of belonging and experiencing a social learning environment. Bauer et al. (2025) further pointed out that in vertical-collectivistic (VC) culture (e.g., China), newcomer proactive behaviors appear to have a greater impact than the organization’s structured support. This implies that general socializing alone may be sufficient to benefit newcomer engagement regardless of serial tactics. Therefore, considering the manufacturing setting and China’s cultural characteristics in Study 1, replicating the study in a different context is warranted.

Additionally, although we have elaborated on the potential cultural implications behind the unexpected nonsignificant two-way interaction of Study 1, we re-examined previous socialization research and identified the potential for other situational factors to provide boundary conditions underpinning our theoretical alternatives. We thus hypothesized that our omission of the third type of resource available to newcomers, namely structural resources relating to task interdependence, might be important (Ellis et al., 2015). In the following discussion, we elaborate on how task interdependence may exert its impacts.

### ***Study 2: task interdependence as a boundary condition***

In the context of attachment theory, Richards and Schat (2011, p. 180) suggested the need to explore ‘contextual features of the work environment (e.g., work interdependence; time spent interacting with others) that may moderate the effects of attachment on performance and other behaviors’. As a structural resource, task interdependence can also

facilitate interactions between newcomers and insiders because proximity increases opportunities for information-seeking and developing interpersonal bonds (Cooper et al., 2021). Hurst et al. (2012) also suggested that task-related interactions encourage non-task communication, fostering self-disclosure and forming affective connections between newcomers and insiders. Following these suggestions, we incorporate task interdependence as an additional moderator in Study 2, proposing that the degree of task interdependence may influence the interaction of general socializing and serial tactics on newcomer engagement (Figure 1).

### ***COR theory hypothesis refinement: when task interdependence is high***

COR theory suggests that the context is important for the utility of resources, 'such that in one context a resource might be salient and positive and in another might be salient but negative' (Hobfoll et al., 2018, p. 113). As such, we posit that the level of task interdependence can further influence newcomers' perceptions of serial tactics. We build from the construal-level perspective (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010), which explores how individuals mentally construe and interpret information based on their psychological distance. Specifically, we argue that newcomers are more likely to interpret guidance and support from experienced members *via* serial tactics as relevant and psychologically close under high task interdependence. This perception arises because task interdependence between newcomers and proximal insiders will likely foster newcomers' sense of connectivity and interpersonal trust (de Jong et al., 2007). Participating in task-related interactions can also create opportunities for informal communication where people share personal information and become emotionally closer (Hurst et al., 2012). Consequently, this suggests that the positive interaction effect of newcomer general socializing and serial tactics on engagement is strengthened under high task interdependence, as newcomers are likely to consider serial tactics a more valuable relational resource.

However, when newcomers receive little guidance or support from insiders (i.e., low serial tactics) in the context of high task interdependence, this mismatch may lead to frustration and stress, hindering newcomers' ability to develop affective ties with insiders. The lack of access to experienced insiders in highly interdependent tasks may hinder newcomer proactivity due to uncertainty about unwritten rules and office politics, potentially leading to increased uncertainty in the social environment. Therefore, when attending workplace events, newcomers need to be more vigilant for social cues and cautious to avoid any issues or conflicts with colleagues. Indeed, such a potential conflict between social versus job roles in general socializing may require newcomers to use

more self-regulatory resources as they navigate the complexities of social interactions. This heightened stress can drain mental and emotional resources, leading to less engagement and reduced cognitive abilities (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Building on this reasoning, we hypothesize that when task interdependence is high, general socializing relates positively to newcomer engagement under high serial tactics, but negatively under low serial tactics.

### ***Attachment theory hypothesis refinement: when task interdependence is low***

As discussed earlier, both serial tactics and high task interdependence help create opportunities for newcomers to interact with insiders (Hurst et al., 2012; Saks et al., 2007). However, from an alternative perspective, what can newcomers do in a relatively independent work environment to build a secure base with others? A key tenet of attachment theory suggests that an individual's attachment behavioral system is activated to cope with the unavailability of their attachment figure (Bowlby, 1982). Therefore, general socializing may become more important in enabling newcomers to understand social norms and culture under low serial tactics and low task interdependence.

Further, based on the construal-level perspective (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010), newcomers may perceive guidance and support from experienced insiders as more distant and less relevant under low task interdependence. The reduced need for collaboration in a low task interdependence context can thus weaken the salience of any potential negative influence from low serial tactics. This aligns with Cooper et al. (2021) argument that proximity, such as task interdependence, plays a crucial role in shaping newcomers' perceptions about the usefulness of insider support in meeting their needs. Therefore, when these newcomers undertake general socializing, they do so of their own will and thus are more likely to benefit from their efforts and achieve engagement.

However, in situations characterized by high serial tactics but low task interdependence, newcomers may perceive guidance and support from experienced members as psychologically distant, unrelated to their role, and therefore irrelevant (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010). Moreover, under low task interdependence, experienced insiders may have limited relevance as role models for newcomers to perform tasks, such that there is little emotional or cognitive common ground. As a result, newcomers are more likely to perceive general socializing as involving casual interactions with little benefit. Consequently, attending social gatherings under high serial tactics and low task interdependence may be seen as a formality or even a distraction, negatively affecting their cognitive

engagement (Methot et al., 2021) and well-being (Yin et al., 2024). Hence, we propose that when task interdependence is low, general socializing relates positively to newcomer engagement under low serial tactics, and negatively under high serial tactics.

**Hypothesis 3:** A three-way interaction exists between general socializing, serial tactics, and task interdependence on newcomer engagement. Specifically, when task interdependence is high (H3a), general socializing relates to emotional engagement and cognitive engagement positively for newcomers experiencing high serial tactics and negatively when newcomers experience low serial tactics. When task interdependence is low (H3b), general socializing relates to emotional engagement and cognitive engagement positively when newcomers experience low serial tactics and negatively when newcomers experience high serial tactics.

## **Study 2 methods**

### *Research procedure and sample*

Study 2 is based on newcomers from a large university in Australia. This research setting provided three advantages. First, as discussed earlier, Study 1 was conducted in China, where newcomers highlight the value of group cohesion and relationships during socialization. Thus, it is useful to replicate and extend Study 1 in a less collectivist context, which provides newcomers with more flexibility to build relationships (for example, Australia, Gelfand et al., 2024). Second, research on newcomer socialization has been conducted in many countries, but only 1% of studies have been conducted in Australia or Oceania (Bauer et al., 2025). Thus, Australia provides an individualistic culture and allows us to provide valuable empirical evidence in an underexplored context. Third, participants in Study 1 had opportunities to engage in social interactions outside of working hours as they shared amenities (e.g., welfare center). Therefore, Study 2 may better reflect a typical environment for newcomers where social events are more limited in scope, which helps to reduce concerns when interpreting the implications in Western countries.

For Study 2, we used the same methods of collecting data. HR coordinated survey distribution by circulating the Qualtrics link to all their newcomers, and a full consulting report with recommendations was sent back to the HR department. Of 500 newcomers invited, we received 155 responses, for a response rate of 31%. Participants' age range was 22–66 years, with a mean age of 39; average organizational tenure was 7.4 months, with a median of 7 months; most participants were female (70%) and of White/European ethnicity (82%); 43% considered themselves permanent staff and 51% indicated they were on fixed-term contracts; and 90% reported having a bachelor's degree or higher.

### Measures

We used the same measures in Study 2 as in Study 1. We used 5-point agreement scales for emotional engagement (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91) and cognitive engagement (Cronbach's alpha = 0.74); a 7-point agreement scale (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree) for the serial tactics (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85); and a 7-point frequency scale (1=never to 7=four or five times a day) for general socializing (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85).

For task interdependence, we used Pearce and Gregersen (1991) 5-item measure (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83) with a 5-point agreement scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). An example item is, 'I frequently must coordinate my efforts with others'.

### Study 2 results

The means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alphas, and correlations among the variables are shown in Table 3. Cronbach's alpha of all the variables ranged from 0.74 to 0.91, indicating the scales achieved adequate reliability.

We adopt the same four-step procedure for testing interaction effects using LMS (Cheung et al., 2021) as in Study 1. The fit indices of the measurement model estimated in Step 1 (Model 4) are  $\chi^2$  with 160  $df=262.93$ , CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.064, and SRMR = 0.064, indicating our model fits the data adequately. None of the standardized factor loadings is significantly lower than 0.5, which provides evidence for convergent validity (Hair et al., 2014). The highest correlation is between emotional engagement and cognitive engagement at 0.64, while all others are lower than 0.5, providing evidence for discriminant validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

**Table 3.** Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha and correlation matrix among variables in Study 2.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Gender	–								
2 Age	–.07	–							
3 Education	–.08	.25**	–						
4 Tenure	.09	.13	.01	–					
5 General Socializing	–.03	.00	–.08	–.11	(.85)				
6 Serial Tactics	.01	–.07	–.02	.10	.05	(.74)			
7 Emotional Engagement	.12	.06	.07	–.04	.15	.34**	(.91)		
8 Cognitive Engagement	.09	.29*	.18	.11	.00	.01	.64**	(.74)	
9 Task Interdependence	.02	.01	–.13	.06	.06	.24**	.28**	.22**	(.83)
MEAN	0.70	39.01	5.45	7.43	2.79	4.29	4.22	4.19	3.90
S.D.	0.46	10.35	1.68	3.32	1.18	1.49	0.78	0.67	0.73

Note:  $N=155$ . General socializing and serial tactics were measured on 7-point scales; task interdependence, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement were measured on 5-point scales. \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Like Study 1, we first estimated the model (Model 5A) with only the effects of control variables on emotional and cognitive engagement, followed by the model (Model 5B) that added the main effects of general socializing, serial tactics, and task interdependence on emotional and cognitive engagement. The fit indices of Model 5B are  $\chi^2$  with 158  $df=260.75$ , CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.065, and SRMR = 0.062, indicating Model 5B fits the data adequately. The estimated parameters are shown in Table 4. We proceed to step 3 by estimating a model (Model 6A) with three two-way interactions and a model (Model 6B) with the additional three-way interaction among general socializing, serial tactics, and task interdependence on emotional and cognitive engagement. The Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-square difference between Model 6B and Model 5B is statistically significant (TRd = 124.52 with 8  $df$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that including interaction effects improves model fit significantly. Results of Model 6B in Table 4 show that the three-way interaction effects on emotional engagement ( $b=0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and cognitive engagement ( $b=0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) are statistically significant.

Following Cheung et al. (2021), we estimated the simple slopes of general socializing on emotional and cognitive engagement at both high (mean + 1 standard deviation) and low (mean - 1 standard deviation) levels of serial tactics and task interdependence, and then compared the slopes across all conditions. We used the Monte Carlo simulation approach (Cheung, 2021) to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for the effects of general socializing on engagement under different levels of serial tactics and task interdependence. The results are shown in Table 5 and Figure 2. Table 5 shows that the effects of general socializing on emotional engagement, when task interdependence is low, are significantly different at high and low levels of serial tactics, indicating a moderating effect ( $b=-0.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). On the other hand, when task interdependence is high, the moderating effects of high versus low serial tactics on the effects of general socializing on emotional engagement is not significantly different ( $b=0.09$ ,  $p=0.455$ ). Figure 2a depicts this moderating effect: General socializing has a significant positive effect on emotional engagement when task interdependence is low and serial tactics are low ( $b=0.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) compared with when task interdependence is low and serial tactics are high ( $b=-0.24$ ,  $p=0.127$ ). Turning to cognitive engagement, the simple slope tests similarly show that when task interdependence is low, the effects of general socializing on cognitive engagement at high and low levels of serial tactics are significantly different ( $b=-0.44$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This is found despite nonsignificant effects for the separate moderator combinations (high serial, low task interdependence  $b=-0.33$ ,  $p=0.052$ ; low serial, low task interdependence  $b=0.11$ ,  $p=0.231$ ). Figure 2b depicts this moderating effect: General socializing



**Table 4.** Estimated regression coefficients of the analytical model in Study 2.

Predictor	Emotional Engagement			Cognitive Engagement				
	Model 5A	Model 5B	Model 6A	Model 6B	Model 5A	Model 5B	Model 6A	Model 6B
Gender	.205 (.122)/.142	.187 (.115)/.129	.195 (.114)/.137	.219 (.114)/.151	.145 (.102)/.115	.141 (.101)/.113	.151 (.101)/.122	.172 (.099)/.138
Age	.044 (.055)/.068	.048 (.050)/.074	.072 (.047)/.114	.083 (.047)/.129	.102* (.045)/.183	.088 (.045)/.159	.098* (.043)/.177	.109** (.042)/.196
Education	.024 (.031)/.059	.035 (.029)/.089	.039 (.029)/.101	.039 (.028)/.098	.022 (.025)/.065	.030 (.026)/.088	.034 (.027)/.100	.034 (.026)/.099
Tenure	-.015 (.015)/-.073	-.022 (.015)/-.108	-.026 (.015)/-.130	-.025 (.015)/-.125	.006 (.015)/.034	.002 (.015)/.013	.001 (.014)/.004	.001 (.015)/.006
General Socializing		.057 (.048)/.104	.055 (.041)/.105	.017 (.043)/.032		-.015 (.042)/-.032	-.010 (.039)/-.022	-.058 (.043)/-.125
Serial Tactics		.178** (.058)/.348	.167** (.063)/.335	.165** (.059)/.318		.000 (.046)/.000	-.013 (.050)/-.030	-.015 (.045)/-.033
Task Interdependence		.182* (.081)/.242	.143 (.075)/.193	.166* (.075)/.220		.215** (.079)/.332	.198* (.081)/.307	.219** (.077)/.335
General Socializing × Serial Tactics			-.053 (.042)/-.132	-.074 (.038)/-.176			-.037 (.039)/-.105	-.060 (.038)/-.165
General Socializing × Task Interdependence			-.066 (.062)/-.110	-.019 (.059)/-.031			-.052 (.057)/-.100	.010 (.060)/.019
Serial Tactics × Task Interdependence			-.041 (.060)/-.073	.006 (.051)/.010			.031 (.075)/.064	.077 (.070)/.151
General Socializing × Serial Tactics × Task Interdependence				.127* (.060)/.265				.140* (.070)/.338
R <sup>2</sup>	.030	.279	.296	.374	.056	.166	.187	.261
R <sup>2</sup> change		.249	.017	.078		.110	.021	.074

*N* = 155. Coefficients are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors)/standardized coefficients.

Age was divided by 10 to achieve a variance comparable to other variables to improve the model fit.

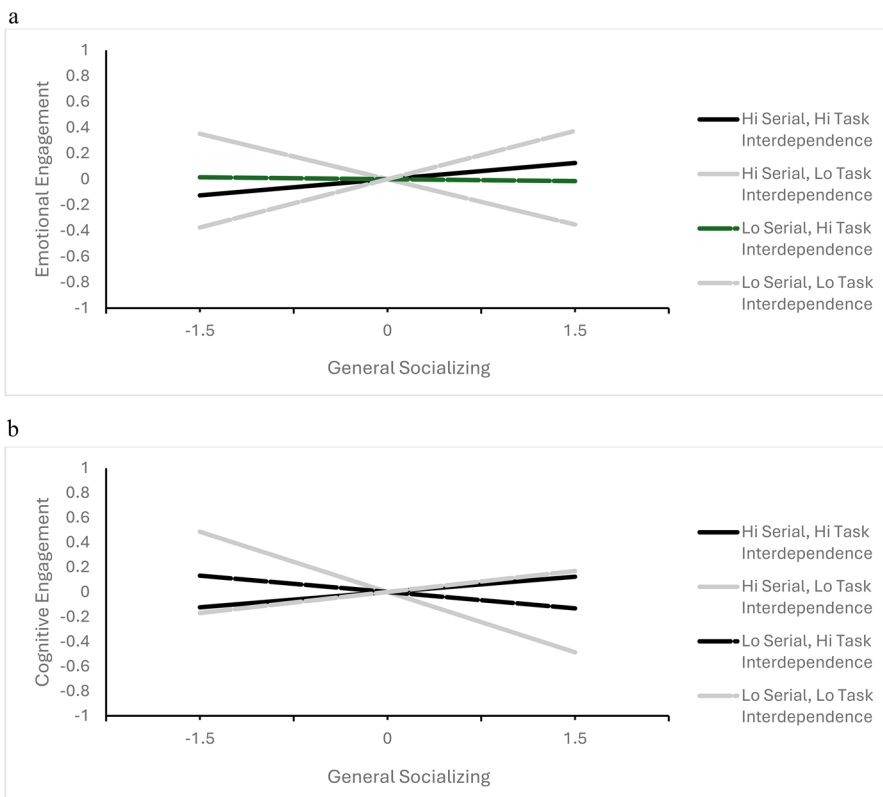
\**p* < 0.01; \*\**p* < 0.01; \*\*\**p* < 0.001.

changes from a positive effect on cognitive engagement under low serial tactic and low task interdependence to a negative effect when the serial tactic is high, and task interdependence is low.

**Table 5.** Moderating effects of serial tactics and task interdependence on the relationships between general socializing and engagement.

		Emotional engagement	Cognitive engagement
Serial Tactics	Task Interdependence		
High	High	.084 [ -.083, .250]	.082 [ -.094, .261]
High	Low	-.235 [ -.540, .056]	-.325 <sup>+</sup> [ -.661, .003]
Low	High	-.010 [ -.228, .204]	-.088 [ -.264, .082]
Low	Low	.250** [ .085, .426]	.113 [ -.080, .308]
High/High – High/Low		.318 [ -.052, .711]	.407 [ -.001, .842]
High/High – Low/High		.094 [ -.158, .355]	.171 [ -.060, .385]
High/Low – Low/Low		-.484** [ -.854, -.138]	-.438* [ -.822, -.019]
Low/High – Low/Low		-.260 [ -.565, .023]	-.201 [ -.537, .118]
High/High – Low/Low		-.166 [ -.418, .074]	-.031 [ -.309, .233]
High/Low – Low/High		-.225 [ -.605, .145]	-.237 [ -.616, .127]

Note: N=155. Entries are unstandardized effects of general socializing on engagement, 95% biased corrected confidence intervals based on 5 million simulated parameters. <sup>+</sup>p<0.10, \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01.



**Figure 2.** (a) Three-way interaction among general socializing, serial tactics and task interdependence on emotional engagement. (b) Three-way interaction among general socializing, serial tactics and task interdependence on cognitive engagement.

## **Study 2 discussion**

As discussed earlier, Study 2 refined and expanded Study 1 by investigating whether the additional structural resource of task interdependence provides a boundary condition that explains the associations of general socializing with newcomer engagement. Accordingly, we hypothesized a three-way interaction in H3. The results of Study 2 do not support H3a, with no evidence for the augmentative effect of the resource-accumulating view. However, the results provide partial support for H3b, indicating that newcomer general socializing positively relates to emotional engagement when newcomers experience low serial tactics and low task interdependence. This finding supports the attachment-seeking view: General socializing acts as a compensatory resource to enable engagement when newcomers experience low serial tactics, but only under low task interdependence. Furthermore, general socializing is negatively related to cognitive engagement under high serial tactics and low task interdependence. This finding is important, suggesting that general socializing can be problematic in some circumstances.

## **General discussion**

In this paper, we started with our first question: When is general socializing effective in enhancing newcomer engagement? In Study 1, the two-way interaction was not supported, yet the main effects of both general socializing and serial tactics were significant. The results of the non-significant two-way interaction motivated us to explore further whether there was a boundary condition. Hence, our second question was: Does task interdependence provide a boundary condition to either augmentative or compensatory effects? In Study 2, we constructively replicated our research in a more individualistic context (i.e., Australia) and integrated discussions with the construal-level perspective (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010) to highlight the underexplored influence of task interdependence. By testing the competing hypotheses and exploring the boundary conditions, we aim to shift research focus from what resources HR practitioners and newcomers can utilize to foster engagement to how to optimize the outcome by allocating proper socialization resources.

As noted, the pattern of two-way interaction of general socializing and serial tactics is consistent (nonsignificant) across both Study 1 and Study 2. The supported three-way interaction in Study 2 enhances Study 1 by demonstrating that the moderating effect of general socializing (a personal resource) and serial tactics (a relational resource) is contingent upon task interdependence (a structural resource). Further, it is worth noting the consistent positive main effects of serial tactics on emotional

engagement across both studies, suggesting that enabling newcomers to access experienced insiders *via* serial tactics has general utility for newcomer adjustment across different cultural contexts.

We also note the absence of main effects of general socializing on newcomer engagement in Study 2, which represents the average effect across all levels of serial tactics and task interdependence, compared to the significant positive impacts of general socializing found in Study 1, which represents the average effect across all levels of serial tactics. The mixed findings here actually support Bauer et al. (2025) finding that newcomer general socializing seems to be more effective in a ‘vertical-collectivistic’ (VC; e.g., China) culture, rather than in a ‘horizontal-individualistic’ (HI; e.g., Australia) culture. Indeed, they argue that ‘where differences emerged, the results were consistent with the cultural congruence argument, supporting the role of feelings of being an insider in VC cultures where insider/outsider distinctions are greater’ (p. 368). That said, future studies could incorporate cultural measures to further examine the impacts of general socializing on newcomer adjustment.

### ***Theoretical implications***

Through testing contrasting hypotheses (augmentative versus compensatory effects), this research extends the organizational socialization literature by challenging the conventional wisdom that general socializing is uniformly beneficial. Instead, our findings demonstrate that newcomer general socializing can be harmful to cognitive engagement if newcomers experience high serial tactics, especially in the context of low task interdependence; while general socializing is more effective at fostering emotional engagement when newcomers experience low serial tactics and low task interdependence. Further, by drawing on the construal-level perspective, we advance the use of attachment theory in socialization research by highlighting the important role of task interdependence. We elaborate on these theoretical contributions below.

First, our findings contribute to a research stream of ‘wise proactivity’ (Parker et al., 2019) by advancing knowledge of the dark side of newcomer proactivity. A small number of studies provide evidence of both proactive behaviors and social behaviors having negative effects: Newcomers participating in informal social events and small talk can be cognitively distracted (Methot et al., 2021) and experience poorer well-being, worse workplace relationships, and higher turnover (Yin et al., 2024). Our findings contribute to this line of inquiry and challenge the generally positive impacts of general socializing (Zhao et al., 2023) by providing evidence to show that newcomer general socializing can be

detrimental, leading to low cognitive engagement, if newcomers have already received referent guidance and support from experienced members through serial tactics, especially in the context of low task interdependence.

Relatedly, we expand the discussions from *what* newcomer proactivity can bring to *when* it can be more effective, contributing to the ongoing discussions of the role of social interactions in newcomer adjustment (Bauer et al., 2025). Our research refines this picture by testing two contrasting views and considering the boundary condition of task interdependence. Our findings demonstrate that certain forms of newcomer proactivity (general socializing) and insiders' support (serial tactics) do not necessarily amplify their positive impacts and bring more benefits. The findings of Study 2 indeed reveal the compensatory effect of general socializing by highlighting that general socializing seems more effective when newcomers lack access to experienced insiders for support, and their tasks do not require frequent collaboration, which provides valuable practical insights into when workplace social events are likely to be more helpful.

Moreover, our research extends the socialization resources view (Saks & Gruman, 2012) by incorporating task interdependence, with work design being an underexplored area in the socialization literature that often emphasizes the roles of newcomers, insiders, and organizational tactics (Batistič, 2018; Bauer et al., 2025; Reichers, 1987). As Saks and Gruman (2012) noted, we still know relatively little about the role of socialization resources, particularly 'socialization tactics or job characteristics' (p. 42). This study aligns with the research call of 'taking a closer look at social interactions' (Bauer et al., 2025) by highlighting the importance of structural factors, in this case, task interdependence, that can enable effective social interaction.

Finally, our research improves the use of attachment theory in the context of organizational socialization by integrating the construal-level perspective (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010). Prior studies have shown that attachment theory can inform our understanding of the role of social support on newcomer socialization (Dong et al., 2024; Nelson et al., 1991; Nelson & Quick, 1991). Our findings that task interdependence affects when general socializing and serial tactics enhance engagement highlight the importance of considering the construal-level (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010) to elucidate the extent to which social support impacts newcomers.

### **Practical implications**

Our studies have relevant implications for HR practitioners and line managers in designing and allocating resources to implement onboarding

practices (see [online supplemental materials](#)). First, considering the positive impacts of serial tactics on emotional engagement across two studies, we suggest creating opportunities for newcomers to identify and get to know experienced insiders and role models through social connections (e.g., mentorship schemes, Birtch et al., 2024). Meanwhile, HR practitioners need to consider providing training and resources to enhance insiders' mentoring and coaching skills so they can help newcomers more effectively.

Moreover, given that our studies were conducted in two distinct cultural contexts (China and Australia), the results also have context-specific implications for HR practitioners working in these contexts. For example, in China, where traditional values such as group harmony and uncertainty avoidance are valued (Hofstede, 2001), both general socializing (e.g., social gatherings) and serial tactics (e.g., mentorship programs) appear to foster engagement. However, HR practitioners working in collectivist cultures should be aware that general socializing and serial tactics may not necessarily reinforce one another to enhance engagement. Instead, we suggest HR practitioners consider which resources best meet newcomers' role needs in the given context and provide appropriate support accordingly.

In Australia, where individualism and flexible relationships are valued (Kitayama & Salvador, 2024), the results support tailoring onboarding interventions to optimize the resource allocation to facilitate newcomer adjustment (Batistič, 2018). The findings indeed echo Bernstein et al. (2015) argument that social integration practices, such as providing newcomers with mentors and social events, should go beyond superficial contact and focus on meaningful interactions. Specifically, as our study reveals, when newcomers experience high task interdependence, they are more likely to feel engaged. Therefore, promoting collaboration between newcomers and insiders through task interdependence, whenever applicable, can help facilitate newcomer engagement.

HR practitioners should also be aware that general socializing is not always beneficial. As our Study 2 suggests, when newcomers face low task interdependence and low serial tactics, providing opportunities that enable newcomers to use general socializing proactively can help them increase emotional engagement. However, if serial tactics are in place and task interdependence is low, frequent participation in social events *via* general socializing may negatively influence cognitive engagement. Consequently, HR practitioners should be careful when encouraging general socializing to avoid potential disruptions and help newcomers maintain cognitive focus.

Although most of the existing socialization studies emphasized the instrumentality of various socialization resources to facilitate newcomer adjustment (e.g., Bauer et al., 2025), the results of our two studies reveal

that multiple resources may not amplify the level of newcomer engagement. These findings imply that HR practitioners should avoid using a one-size-fits-all approach (Batistič, 2018) and be mindful of allocating relevant, supportive resources to help newcomers develop high-quality social connections. Also, given the importance of situational factors, HR practitioners should be flexible and regularly review resource allocation, making adjustments as needed to fit the work context.

### ***Limitations and future research***

We acknowledge several limitations of our research. First, both studies use self-report data, which may be subject to biases. Additionally, a cross-sectional research design cannot be used to infer causality and raises concerns about common method variance. However, to lessen the potential problem of common method bias, we provided clear information on protections for respondent anonymity, varied the scale anchors, and labeled all scale points (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Moreover, as we focus on moderating effects, the likelihood of common method bias influencing the findings presented here is minimal (Chang et al., 2010). That said, we suggest future research using multiple-wave designs to investigate the proposed relationships among variables, collecting data from diverse newcomers across different sectors, and gathering views from additional sources such as supervisors or colleagues. Also, given that our findings come from China and Australia, future studies should test the proposed relationships in other cultural contexts (e.g., South Asia, Latin America) to check the generalizability of our findings, and explore specific cultural dimensions (e.g., relational mobility, Kitayama & Salvador, 2024) to enhance our understanding of newcomer proactivity in different cultures.

Moreover, although our studies were not designed to compare sectoral differences, it is important to note that general socializing norms, mentoring systems and task interdependence could differ across sectors and affect newcomer adjustment. Specifically, different values may occur across sectors and shape how work gets done, which, in turn, may influence employees' satisfaction (Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2013). Taking the current study contexts in turn, first, in a manufacturing site, job roles may require a high level of interdependence daily to ensure production goes smoothly; mentoring schemes may focus on accuracy and problem solving; and general socializing may occur more regularly. In a higher education setting, there is usually a high level of individual autonomy (Niemczyk & Rónay, 2023) and therefore task interdependence may be on a less frequent basis; mentoring schemes may be focused on career more than daily tasks; and general socializing may occur infrequently, primarily for special occasions. Future research should investigate whether

and how occupational values and settings can shape the effects of socialization support on newcomer adjustment.

Further, our research only explored one relationship-building behavior, namely general socializing. Despite the benefits of general socializing, newcomers may use other ways to form social connections, such as inter-departmental networking and boss-relationship building, which may have varying impacts (Yin et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2023). Thus, it would be valuable to explore whether other newcomer relationship-building behaviors, as personal resources, interact with relational and structural resources to produce similar effects, helping to triangulate our results. Moreover, this research investigated serial tactics, focusing on experienced insiders who often act as mentors or role models to guide newcomers in performing jobs. Following prior studies (e.g., Bauer et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2005), we treated serial tactics as a broad construct where support might be supplied by various insiders. More recently, some studies have investigated newcomer-supervisor exchange (e.g., Ou et al., 2018) and newcomer-mentor relationships (Birtch et al., 2024). This suggests the value of investigating how serial tactics are supplied across different dyads, including newcomer-peer newcomer, newcomer-formal mentor, and newcomer-supervisor.

Apart from task interdependence, other structural factors may further enrich our understanding of attachment-seeking and newcomer adjustment. For example, receiving guidance and support from someone with a similar level of power and status is more likely to pose a threat to self-esteem than support from someone with a higher rank (Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, exploring how power dynamics influence newcomer-insider interaction would be valuable in providing a more complete picture of newcomer socialization and informing HR practices. Similarly, following Bauer et al. (2025) suggestion, investigating the effects of newcomers' network characteristics (e.g., network status and friendship ties, Fang et al., 2017) from a systems view could be valuable to improve our understanding of the interactive nature of the socialization process.

Finally, there may be mediating factors<sup>1</sup> channelling the relationships between general socializing and newcomer engagement. For example, in horizontal-collectivistic cultures (e.g., China), general socializing may foster a strong sense of belonging and enhance perceptions of insider status, which is highly valued (Ou et al., 2018) and, in turn, enhances newcomer engagement. In contrast, in vertical-individualistic cultures (e.g., Australia), newcomers have more freedom in developing social relationships, reflecting a great value placed on personal autonomy and choice (Gelfand et al., 2024). As a result, general socializing may more effectively cultivate perceived insider status and elicit engagement only when other networking opportunities (e.g., work collaboration under high task

independence or mentoring under serial tactics) are lacking. Other mediators, such as perceived organizational support, have been explored in socialization research (Birtch et al., 2024) and may offer interesting avenues to test when resources are most effectively combined across different cultural contexts.

In conclusion, our research investigated the joint effects of personal (general socializing), relational (serial tactics), and structural (task interdependence) resources on newcomer engagement. By testing the contrasting hypotheses and adopting the lens of construal-level theory, the findings extend our knowledge on when general socializing can be more effective for newcomers. We call for more research investigating how context shapes the effectiveness of newcomer proactivity to enhance newcomer adjustment.

### Note

1. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for this insightful suggestion.

### Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the University of the West of England (UWE).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request.

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