



Organizational Socialization of Academic Librarians in the United States



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate academic librarians' organizational socialization. Successful socialization can increase librarians' commitments to and retention in the libraries, which may enhance the quality of information services to library patrons. In addition to collecting demographic information, we measured the organizational socialization of 314 academic librarians using Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner's (1994) content framework. Study participants possessed high levels of socialization in their libraries overall. They were well socialized in Politics, followed by Performance Proficiency (task/skills), and Language; however, their socialization in Organizational goals/values, History, and People were relatively low, suggesting that there is room for improvement. Other key findings are: (1) male participants had lower levels of socialization in the People dimension than did females; (2) participants who were tenured had higher levels of socialization than did those who had not yet achieved tenure; (3) participants who had informal mentoring experiences had higher levels of socialization overall compared to those who had not received any mentoring; and (4) participants' socialization was associated negatively with the number of employees in their libraries and with the highest degree offered by their institutions. The study findings can be used to understand the learning and adjustment process of academic librarians in the United States, predict their retention and job satisfaction, and develop and improve library training or orientation programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Socialization is “the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less able members of their society” (Brim, 1966, p. 3). Socialization is one of the important factors leading to the success of an organization and individuals who belong to the organization. Organizational socialization refers to the process by which an individual acquires knowledge, skills, culture, and roles as a member of an organization (Fisher, 1986; Klein & Weaver, 2000; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), and the learning and adjustment process of employees to their roles within an organization (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). Individuals are viewed as socially constructed selves in the context of their organizations because their behaviors may be influenced by social norms in those organizations (Schein, 1971). Successful organizational socialization is positively associated with individuals' career outcomes, such as job performance, job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Feldman, 1981; Fisher, 1986).

Successful socialization can improve librarians' commitments to and retention in their libraries (Ballard & Blessing, 2006; Black & Laysen, 2002; Chapman, 2009), which may enhance the quality of information

services to library patrons. For this reason, the assessment of librarians' socialization experiences in their libraries can be referenced as indicators of future performance and as markers of any individual or organizational issues to address. Nevertheless, relatively few attempts have been made to examine librarians' socialization processes and experiences within library settings. A few prior studies have investigated the socialization of academic librarians, but they have focused on the development and improvement of orientation programs for new librarians only. Organizational socialization, however, takes place throughout an individual's career (Matthews, 2002; Schein, 1971). Therefore, in this study we aim to measure the socialization process of full-time librarians who are currently working in academic libraries. Specifically, three research questions are examined:

RQ 1. To what extent are academic librarians socialized into their libraries?

RQ 2. How is the socialization of academic librarians related to their demographic characteristics?

RQ 3. How is the socialization of academic librarians related to the characteristics of those libraries?

Organizational socialization can be assessed in two ways: by 1) measuring a process of learning socialization content (e.g., performance proficiency, people, politics, languages, organizational goals and values, and history) (Chao et al., 1994; Klein & Heuser, 2008) or 2) evaluating performance outcomes, namely proximal and distal socialization outcomes

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(e.g., role clarity, social integration, job satisfaction, commitment, retention, and tenure) (Klein & Heuser, 2008). Of two assessment approaches, measuring learning outcome using a socialization content framework has strengths in that it is a relatively more direct approach than measuring performance outcomes. Chao et al.'s (1994) framework has been most frequently used to measure the socialization of employees in several different organizational settings such as an educational institution (Klein & Weaver, 2000), a hotel (Hart, 2012), and a consulting firm (Wesson & Gogus, 2005). Our study uses Chao et al.'s (1994) framework to assess the organizational socialization of academic librarians.

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS

Only a few researchers have examined the topic of organizational socialization in library settings, although they have acknowledged its importance in improving librarians' retention, job commitment, and job satisfaction (Chapman, 2009; Oud, 2008; Simmons-Welburn & Welburn, 2003). Such researchers have discussed proposing ways to enhance librarians' socialization levels in academic libraries, focusing on orientation programs, based on the belief that early socialization is critical for employee job satisfaction and retention. For example, Ballard and Blessing (2006) proposed three elements of an effective orientation program for newly employed librarians at North Carolina State University Libraries, including (1) orientation sessions, (2) orientation checklists, and (3) individual meetings. Chapman (2009) also pointed out the need for improvement in orientation programs to retain librarians, proposing three components for successful employee orientation and socialization: (1) use of checklists, (2) role of supervisors, and (3) buddy/mentor relationships.

Other researchers have introduced methods to improve the socialization process in academic librarians in general. For example, Black and Leysen (2002) argued that effective socialization tactics are significant for new academic librarians, given that library graduate programs do not provide sufficient training in developing "a professional identity" or "peer interaction" (p. 4). Based on an analysis of 122 survey responses, they suggested several strategies to improve the socialization experiences of new librarians, including a proactive recruitment process, effective orientation programs, and a supportive mentoring environment. In addition, Simmons-Welburn and Welburn (2003) described the importance of formal orientation, mentoring, interaction with the campus community, and information seeking behaviors in the socialization process. Furthermore, Oud (2008) suggested providing reasonable expectations to job candidates during recruiting, effective training and orientation programs, and mentoring to facilitate new librarians' job transitions.

Overall, previous organizational socialization studies conducted in library settings were superficial in that they did not address any antecedents or consequences of socialization with empirical data. However, we can infer that successful socialization improves librarians' job commitment, satisfaction, and retention from other studies done in different contexts; for example, Chao et al. (1994) conducted a longitudinal study that relates the level of socialization to changes in jobs/organizations and career effectiveness. They found that the level of socialization has a positive association with career effectiveness, such as career involvement, personal income, and job satisfaction. Also, Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2002) surveyed newcomers in the British Army at three different times and found that their level of socialization positively predicted outcome variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitments, and retention. Moreover, Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, and Tucker (2007) conducted a meta-analysis on studies about organizational newcomers and found that socialization dimensions were partly related to the outcomes of newcomers. They also found that information seeking and socialization tactics were related to newcomers' socialization.

Although no studies have directly examined an association between the socialization outcomes and the service quality in libraries, we can assume their possible linkage through the studies conducted in different service organizations. For example, Hartline and Ferrell (1993) surveyed three different groups (hotel general managers, customer-contact employees, and hotel guests) in the hotel industry. They found that employees' overall organizational socialization is positively associated with job satisfaction, a major determinant of service quality. Hoffman and Ingram (1992) explored a relationship between the job satisfaction of employees and customer-oriented behavior in the home healthcare market. Based on the correlations between overall job satisfaction dimensions and customer-oriented behavior, Hoffman and Ingram suggested monitoring and improving the job satisfaction of service providers. Furthermore, Malhotra and Mukherjee (2004) tested the relationship between job satisfaction/organizational commitment and the service quality of customer-contact employees in call centers of a bank in the UK. Their study revealed significant positive correlations between job satisfaction and service quality and between affective commitment (defined as an "employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (p. 166)) and service quality. Another study (Kelley, Skinner, & Donnelly, 1992) extended the scope of research to suggest the importance of organizational socialization of service customers. Kelley et al. (1992) found that the socialization level of service customers is positively related to their perceptions of the organizational climate for service, motivational directions, and levels of satisfaction, which contribute to the improvement of service quality.

Overall, researchers have acknowledged the significance of successful socialization of academic librarians to their libraries. However, previous studies were limited to proposing several ways to improve the process, and few researchers have related the level of socialization to its outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment and retention. Given the positive associations between such outcomes and service quality, we can further speculate that successful socialization helps libraries achieve their organizational goals of providing high quality services to their patrons, warranting future research. As a first step for linking librarians' socialization to their outcomes, the current study attempted to measure the extent to which librarians are actually socialized.

SOCIALIZATION CONTENT FRAMEWORK

Many researchers have proposed content frameworks for assessing the organizational socialization of employees (Chao et al., 1994; Feldman, 1981; Klein & Heuser, 2008; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993). In particular, Chao et al. (1994) proposed a 34-item scale for measuring six content dimensions of socialization through confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis. Because of the validity of the scale items, their framework has been used frequently in organizational socialization research (Hart, 2012; Klein & Weaver, 2000) despite its limited coverage and its inconsistency in measuring different types of socialization outcomes (e.g., learning outcomes and proximal outcomes) at different levels (e.g., job-level, organization-level) (Haueter, Macan, & Winter, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Therefore, in our study, we adapted Chao et al.'s (1994) content framework to measure the organizational socialization of academic librarians.

Chao et al.'s (1994) framework proposes six dimensions of organizational socialization:

1. *History* reflects the degree to which individuals have acquired the traditions, customs, myths, and rituals of their organization.
2. *Language* shows the "individual's knowledge of the profession's technical language as well as knowledge of the acronyms, slang, and jargon that are unique to the organization."
3. *Politics* covers the "individual's success in gaining information regarding formal and informal work relationships and power structures within the organization."

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