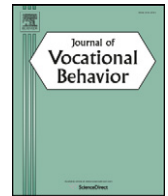




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Joint effects of social networks and information giving on innovative performance after organizational entry[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We combine the social network approach and organizational socialization literature in order to examine the influence of social networks and proactive behavior on newcomers' innovative performance. A sample of new employees completed questionnaires on social network and proactive measures, and their supervisors rated their innovative performance. The results suggest that both sparse (low density) social networks and newcomers' information giving were related to innovative performance. The results also indicate that information giving moderated the relation between sparse social networks and innovative performance: when newcomers' information giving was high, the characteristics of their social networks were not related to their innovative performance.

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Organizational socialization is argued to be a process that fosters new employees' integration into organizations (e.g., Feldman, 1981). Research has shown that socialization during organizational entry is related to newcomers' adjustment to work, i.e. mastering the tasks of the job, social integration with co-workers, and obtaining knowledge about their role in the job and organization (review, Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007). Furthermore, some scholars have argued that new employees do not only try to adjust and fit into the new environment; they also try to propose new ideas and introduce changes at the workplace, i.e. show innovative performance (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Feldman, 1994). Some scholars even suggest that organizations expect employees to show innovative behavior at the workplace (Unsworth, Wall, & Carter, 2005). Indeed, it has been argued that innovative behavior is an essential aim of successful socialization: "organizational socialization – if it is truly to make new recruits effective, participating members – should lead to innovation and spontaneous cooperation" (Feldman, 1981: 315; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Organizational socialization theory and research has focused on newcomers' "role orientation" when examining newcomers as a source of change and new ideas at the workplace. Role orientation refers to behavior that aims to either maintain the status quo in one's job (custodial role orientation) or attempts to change work practices and even redefine one's role in the job (content and role innovation; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). As antecedents of role innovation, earlier research has examined socialization tactics, i.e. the organizational means with which to socialize new employees, such as training, and newcomers' proactive behavior. Research findings indicate that socialization tactics (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jones, 1986) and proactive behavior such as seeking feedback (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995) are related to self-rated role innovation. Earlier socialization

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literature generally suggests that new employees will perform innovatively at the workplace, depending on formal socialization practices in the organization and on their proactive behavior.

However, recent socialization theory argues that one has to also focus on the social environment as well as newcomers' behavior in order to understand the success of socialization, shown by, for example, innovative performance. That is, organizational socialization has been characterized as a process during which the social ties and interaction between new employees and more experienced members of the organization, i.e. organizational insiders, are the main tools for bringing newcomers "on-board" (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Jablin, 2001; Reichers, 1987). Unfortunately there seems to be no earlier research on how the characteristics of the social environment, such as social ties between newcomers and organizational insiders, relate to innovative performance after organizational entry. This is surprising, since theory on creativity in organizations emphasizes the importance of the social environment in developing new, useful ideas at the workplace (e.g., Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Thus, our first aim was to examine how the characteristics of newcomers' social environments, as indicated by their social networks at the workplace, are related to their innovative behavior. Furthermore, socialization research on newcomer proactive behavior has mainly focused on how newcomers seek information and feedback from organizational insiders in order to learn and adjust to their jobs. However, newcomers may also give more experienced members of the organization information (e.g., Jablin, 2001) and this information giving may enhance their integration with organizational insiders and support their innovative performance. Indeed, earlier research suggests that organizational insiders appreciate newcomers' knowledge (Gallagher & Sias, 2009). The second aim of our study was to examine the role of such newcomers' information giving to organizational insiders in innovative performance. Finally, given that social interaction between new employees and organizational insiders is a key for successful socialization, it is of great importance to focus on how the characteristics of the social environment and newcomer behavior interactively enhance successful socialization (e.g., Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Ashforth, Sluss, & Saks, 2007; Reichers, 1987). Unfortunately, socialization research on the social environment and research on proactive behavior have to a large extent proceeded independently of each other (cf., Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song, 2013). Thus, our final aim was to investigate the joint effects of social networks and proactive behavior, i.e. information giving related to innovative behavior after organizational entry. To further strengthen our research design we used supervisor ratings of innovative behavior in order to obtain organizational insiders' views on newcomer behavior, since earlier socialization research has mainly used newcomers' self-ratings in examining their role innovation.

1. Theory and hypotheses

1.1. Social network approach and innovative performance

The probability of individuals' proposing creative or innovative ideas is inherently tied to their social environment (e.g., George, 2007). It has been typically argued that the social environment is an important source of knowledge, advice, and encouragement for the development of innovative ideas (e.g., Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Woodman et al., 1993). The social network approach in particular argues that the ways in which a person gets information and advice, resulting in innovative or creative performance, is dependent on the characteristics of the social networks at the workplace (e.g., Burt, 2005). An important characteristic of a social network is how its members are connected to one another, i.e. the network structure.

Network brokerage refers to a sparse network structure in which people are not interconnected well and few people "broker" information and advice to those who are not connected to each other. In describing this kind of network structure, the "network density" concept refers to the extent to which the members are connected to each other. Thus, a brokerage network is characterized by low density, since people do not share many ties with each other (e.g., Marsden, 1990). The social network approach argues that the "brokerage role" in a sparse network brings a person information benefits, since this kind of role typically exists between people who belong to different social groups, and information is often more heterogeneous between groups than in a single group (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973).

Earlier research has shown mixed findings regarding the role of network brokerage in innovative performance and in related activities such as creativity. Some research findings indicate that brokerage networks are related to innovative ideas (Burt, 2004), whereas others show the opposite, i.e. closed (high density) networks are related to involvement in innovation (Obstfeld, 2005). In contrast, some research shows no relation between network brokerage and creativity, i.e. providing new, useful ideas (Perry-Smith, 2006; Zhou, Shin, Brass, Choi, & Zhang, 2009). Finally, some studies show that network brokerage has contingent effects on innovative performance (Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007; Tortoriello & Krackhardt, 2010). For example, they show that actors' experience in the field moderates the effect of brokerage on innovation (Fleming et al., 2007).

However, the innovative performance of new employees in particular may depend on their location in the sparse networks of relationships i.e. networks which offer brokerage opportunities, since newcomers often have limited knowledge about the people, procedures, and practices in the organization. Indeed, earlier research suggests that new employees in an organization have limited knowledge concerning "who-knows-what" in the organization (Singh, Hansen, & Podolny, 2010), and limited task-, role- and organization-related knowledge after organizational entry (e.g., Jablin, 2001). Since newcomers often have these knowledge limitations, sparse networks may play an important role in their ability to acquire information and knowledge for their performance. In line with this argumentation, earlier research has shown that newcomers' sparse social networks are related to job performance (Jokisaari, 2013). Along similar lines, research on work groups has found that new members benefit more from network ties than people who are familiar with each other (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006).

Furthermore, newcomers' innovative performance may benefit from sparse networks, because they are often a source of heterogeneous information and this kind of information frequently plays an important role in innovative performance (e.g., George, 2007).

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