

**New to the Watercooler:
Differential Effects of Relationship Building for Female versus Male Newcomers**

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Abstract

We empirically test the social capital model of organizational socialization (SCM) and refine it by examining the influence of gender on its tenets. Research indicates that when new employees socialize with coworkers, they gain relational benefits that contribute to improved newcomer adjustment and onboarding outcomes. Although this work has deepened our understanding of the nature and consequences of newcomer socializing, it has tended to view these positive outcomes as equally accessible to all newcomers. This oversight is meaningful given that men and women do not always earn equal social credit for engaging in social behaviors such as relationship building at work (e.g., socializing with coworkers). Integrating SCM and social role theory, we hypothesize a model predicting that newcomer gender will influence whether relationship building behaviors during socialization lead to coworker social support, with subsequent implications for newcomer adjustment (i.e., role clarity, task mastery, and social integration). We test this model in a time-lagged study of 183 new employees. Our findings generally support the predictions made by SCM and social role theory, indicating that relationship building positively relates to coworker support and subsequent newcomer adjustment for men but not for women. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

Keywords: gender; relationship building; newcomer adjustment; socialization; coworker support

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Most new employees seek to build relationships with, and be socially accepted by, their coworkers (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). One common means of creating bonds with coworkers is by engaging in the social side of the organization (Gruman & Saks, 2011), such as by joining social office events (e.g., company softball team), attending nonmandatory social gatherings (e.g., happy hours), and spending time chatting with coworkers (Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Because engaging in relationship building with coworkers in these ways is not required, it is typically conceptualized as a discretionary behavior that newcomers perform with the goal of meeting new colleagues and deepening nascent bonds with existing coworkers (Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas, 2011).

Research indicates that such extra efforts to build relationships lead to positive job and career outcomes for newcomers. Indeed, building on Ashford and Black's (1996) finding that relationship building positively relates to job satisfaction in newcomers, researchers have shown that it also relates to increases in newcomer social integration, role clarity, commitment, and intention to remain (Saks et al., 2011; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000), employee learning, well-being, and work engagement (Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler, & Saks, 2014), and employee creativity and citizenship behavior (Kammeyer-Mueller, Livingston, & Liao, 2011). Additional work indicates that the association between relationship building and positive socialization outcomes is mediated by connections with, and support from, coworkers. Specifically, the social capital model of organizational socialization (SCM) proposes that relationship building creates social capital for newcomers that leads to newcomer adjustment and career success (Fang, Duffy, & Shaw, 2011). In support of this theory, Wang and Kim (2013)

found that newcomer socializing facilitates the attainment of insider status among coworkers, which then leads to elevated task performance and social integration.

Collectively, these findings indicate that when newcomers engage in relationship building, they form stronger and more supportive bonds with their coworkers, which contributes to their adjustment and corresponding positive work outcomes (e.g., job performance, role clarity, and social integration). Implicit within this stream of research is the notion that the behavior of new employees is experienced and viewed similarly by other organizational members, regardless of the characteristics of the newcomers. However, the tenability of this notion is challenged by social role theory, which explains that communal behaviors like relationship building are consistent with stereotypic expectations associated with females (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). This theory posits that when women behave in ways consistent with stereotypic expectations, these behaviors tend to go unnoticed (Heilman & Chen, 2005). At the same time, because communal behaviors are positive but inconsistent with men's prescribed gender roles, male employees tend to garner enhanced social rewards when they perform them (i.e., the male communality bonus; Hentschel, Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2018). Reinforcing this effect, research based on social role theory has shown that even when ostensibly communal behaviors are viewed as agentic, men are evaluated more favorably than women (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Therefore, regardless of whether existing organization members view newcomers' relationship-building efforts as an attempt to get ahead (agentic) or to get along (communal), such attributions are more likely to benefit males than female newcomers. Combined, social role theory suggests a gender-based boundary condition of the predictions made by the SCM. Namely, its tenets indicate that the positive effects of newcomer relationship building will be more accessible to men than to their female counterparts.

In this paper, we take a social role theory perspective on the social capital model of organizational socialization. Our aim is twofold. We first retest the SCM and attempt to constructively replicate prior research findings that underscore the benefits of newcomer relationship building for socialization outcomes via coworker support. Second, we examine a theoretically grounded boundary condition of the effects of newcomer relationship building during socialization—gender (see Figure 1).

Our research contributes to the understanding of newcomer socialization in several important ways. First, a key contribution of this research is that we answer the call to investigate the mechanisms that link proactive tactics to particular socialization outcomes (Zhao, Liu, Zawacki, Michel, & Li, 2022) by empirically testing the theoretical propositions of the SCM as outlined by Fang et al. (2011). Previous studies have focused on whether newcomer relationship building predicts access to social capital or the relationship between the mobilization of social capital and newcomer adjustment (Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song, 2013). We analyze these relationships concurrently to assess the direct and indirect effects of relationship building during the initial months of employment. This comprehensive analysis allows for a constructive replication of prior research and helps rule out the possibility that earlier findings were due to chance or sampling error (Köhler & Cortina, 2021, 2023). Moreover, our study advances knowledge by examining the SCM's generalizability or (lack of) variation in the consequences of relationship building. We specifically focus on integrating social role theory with the SCM to investigate if the benefits of relationship building with coworkers extend equally to both male and female newcomers. This line of investigation enriches the literature on diversity by responding to the call for research into potential gender differences in the socialization process (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012; Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Existing

research suggests that females may be less likely than males to engage in relationship-building behaviors due to concerns about incurring backlash (Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012; Kim, Cable, & Kim, 2005), but the extent to which this fear of backlash is valid remains unclear. By empirically examining this issue, we aim to further our understanding of gender dynamics in the socialization process.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Background of Social Capital Model of Socialization

When an individual joins a new organization, they undergo an adjustment process to adapt to their new surroundings. This process is vital for reducing uncertainty regarding tasks, roles, and social transitions (Fang et al., 2011; Fisher, 1986). To successfully adjust, newcomers typically need to achieve three outcomes—task mastery (i.e., knowing how to perform the job), role clarity (i.e., understanding the responsibilities and constraints associated with the position), and social integration (i.e., feeling like a part of the immediate workgroup) (Morrison, 2002). Prior research suggests that these three facets of adjustment are driven by two key socialization factors: organizational tactics and newcomer proactivity (Bauer et al., 2007; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007). Organizational tactics encompass all onboarding practices that companies use to socialize newcomers. These tactics inform newcomers of their roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, newcomer proactivity involves behaviors that newcomers enact to facilitate their adjustment to their new workplace (Fang et al., 2011). These two factors work in tandem. Since it is not possible for organizations to provide all the necessary information for newcomers to be socialized effectively (Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Muller, 2000), newcomers must take an active role. By building relationships with organizational insiders, newcomers can supplement the information provided

by the organization and more fully adjust to their new roles (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2003; Gruman, Saks, & Zweig, 2006; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011; Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas, 2011; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

The socialization process described above explains the causes and consequences of newcomer socialization. However, it offers little insight into the mechanisms that underpin this process. Addressing this gap, Fang and colleagues (2011) developed a social capital-based model of the organizational socialization process. The model conceptualizes social capital as a critical resource (e.g., information) embedded in the structures of newcomers' relationships with organizational insiders. Moreover, the model describes how two sequential processes—access to and mobilization of social capital—provide the theoretical link that explains how socialization factors lead to newcomer adjustment (and subsequent career success).

The SCM proposes that organizational socialization tactics (viz., institutionalized, structured forms of socialization), such as orientation programs and mentoring, facilitate newcomers' access to social capital in three primary ways. First, these tactics offer a structure that promotes communication between newcomers and organizational insiders. Second, they motivate newcomers to be proactive in accessing social capital. Lastly, these tactics direct newcomers to the most reliable sources of information within the organization. The model goes on to highlight three types of newcomer proactivity that represent the active ways in which newcomers develop social capital: relationship building (i.e., behavior aimed at developing social connections), sense-making (i.e., searching for and obtaining information related to the job or organization), and positive framing (i.e., interpreting the work environment positively). Fang et al. (2011) posit that relationship building is the strongest predictor of social capital accessibility because it facilitates the other two forms of proactivity. That is, relationship

building enables newcomers to acquire informational and instrumental support that helps them to make sense of their surroundings and develop a positive outlook on their new work situation.

Empirical evidence also supports the first part of Fang et al.'s (2011) unfolding model, which depicts the social capital access process. For example, Sanclemente, Gamero, Medina, and Mendoza-Denton (2022) found that institutionalized socialization tactics positively relate to the accessibility of social capital. Specifically, they recruited newcomers from 25 different companies in Spain and discovered that socialization strategies implemented by organizations were positively associated with the extent that newcomers with disabilities received social support from their coworkers. Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer, and Erdogan (2017) investigated the role of newcomer proactivity at a technology company in India and demonstrated that relationship building was associated with increased social capital in the form of a sense of belongingness and connectedness at work. Collectively, these findings suggest the importance of frequent interaction and communication between newcomers and experienced coworkers to facilitate newcomers' access to the valuable information and social resources that their coworkers possess.

A central principle of the SCM is that having access to social capital is a precondition for its mobilization. The social capital accessed through newcomer proactivity must be mobilized to achieve adjustment. This involves acquiring information and resources from social relationships, which reduces ambiguity and uncertainty (Fang et al., 2011; Gruman et al., 2006). The assumption is that the more opportunities newcomers have to build relationships with their veteran colleagues, the better they can mobilize the social capital embedded in their communication network. This is because frequently interacting and communicating with insiders allow newcomers to obtain various information and social resources critical for their effective adjustment. As proposed by the SCM, empirical studies have shown that forming social network

ties (e.g., Choi, 2014; Morrison, 2002) and acquiring support from coworkers positively relate to indicators of newcomer adjustment (e.g., Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012; Harris, Cooper-Thomas Smith, & Cheung, 2022; Nasr, El Akremi, & Coyle-Shapiro, 2019). These findings clearly align with Fang et al.'s (2011) predictions that newcomers adjust better when they obtain informational and social resources from coworkers that help clarify role responsibilities and reduce uncertainties about job responsibilities and how to be accepted by other organizational members. Indeed, newcomers' uncertainty about tasks, roles, and social transitions has been shown to lessen significantly when they acquire social support from coworkers (Ashford & Black, 1996; Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012; Reichers, 1987).

To our knowledge, only one study has empirically investigated whether socialization factors are indirectly related to newcomer adjustment outcomes through the process proposed by the SCM. Wang and Kim (2013) surveyed newcomers across four manufacturing organizations in China and found that newcomers' proactive socialization behavior relates indirectly to their social integration and task performance through its relationship with the extent to which employees believed that they were insiders in the organization. Consistent with the SCM, Wang and Kim (2013) reasoned that perceived insider status (a form of accessed social capital) positively relates to newcomer adjustment because employees gain more information or feedback and know what others expect.

Similar to Wang and Kim (2013), we test the SCM's predictions by examining the relationship between newcomer proactive behaviors and newcomer adjustment via newcomer social capital. We focus primarily on newcomers' relationship building behavior because the SCM (Fang et al., 2011) and prior research point to building relationships through behaviors like socializing with coworkers and participating in office events, as a key means via which

newcomers gain access to important social resources that facilitate their adjustment to a new organization (e.g., Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Feldman, 1977; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Our study focuses specifically on coworker support as an important mechanism linking relationship-building behavior and newcomer adjustment, given that the quality of newcomers' relationships with coworkers has been shown to be the most reliable predictor of socialization outcomes (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992), particularly within 90 days of employment (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). We also chose to focus on the receipt of instrumental support (rather than affective support) from coworkers to more directly examine the social capital mobilization process as proposed by the SCM (Bauer & Erdogan, 2014; Fang et al., 2011). In doing so, we aim to replicate and extend recent research indicating that newcomers' relationship building positively relates to coworkers' information sharing and instrumental aid in the socialization process (Ellis et al., 2017) and that this coworker support positively relates to subsequent newcomer adjustment (Harris & Cooper-Thomas, 2022; Nasr et al., 2019). We intend to show how newcomers' relationship-building activities are not only indirectly related to social integration, as demonstrated by Wang and Kim (2013), but also to the development of task mastery and role clarity. This is consistent with Feldman (1981), who suggested that newcomers must master their tasks, understand their roles, and integrate socially if they are to successfully adjust (for a review, see Bauer & Erdogan, 2014).

Therefore, drawing upon the fundamental tenets of the SCM, we hypothesize that newcomer relationship building during their first month of employment will relate positively to coworker support. The informational and social support received from coworkers, in turn, is

expected to facilitate newcomer adjustment with respect to task mastery, role clarity, and social integration.

Hypothesis 1: Newcomer relationship building is indirectly related to (a) task mastery, (b) role clarity, and (c) social integration via coworker social support.

A Social Role Theory Perspective on the Social Capital Model of Socialization

Although we predict that the general tenets of SCM will be supported in our empirical test of them, there are compelling theoretical reasons to believe that when newcomers seek out interaction opportunities and participate in social activities, it will not always facilitate their adjustment. Relevant to newcomer relationship building, the workplace friendship literature provides compelling evidence that men and women differ in the types of relationships they form, with men's tending to be instrumental and women's being more communal in nature (Morrison, 2009; Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2017). These insights align with those of social role theory, which explains that communal behaviors like relationship building are congruent with female gender stereotypes (Eagly, 1983; Eagly & Wood, 2012). This can be contrasted with the agentic behaviors more consistent with male gender stereotypes, such as assertiveness.

In an extension to social role theory, role congruity theory goes on to explain that in the workplace and other domains, when people act in ways that are congruent with their gender, it can go unnoticed, particularly when it comes to women's engagement in communal behavior (Chiaburu, Sawyer, Smith, Brown, & Harris, 2014; Heilman & Chen, 2005). However, when there is a stereotype violation, which occurs when men engage in communal behaviors, it amplifies the likelihood that others will notice the behavior. This is a key tenet of expectancy violations theory (Burgoon 1993; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987), and tests of it in the work domain have shown that when men engage in communal behavior, it tends to not only be noticed

but also viewed positively (Bettencourt, Dill, Greathouse, Charlton, & Mulholland, 1997; Hentschel, Braun, Peus, & Frey, 2018; Shaughnessy, Mislin, & Hentschel, 2015). This means that during employees' initial days and weeks on the job, when their relationships with coworkers are still largely a blank slate, relationship building is more likely to be attended to and viewed positively by coworkers when male newcomers engage in it, relative to female newcomers. Thus, the social support that relationship building can engender should be more accessible to men than women, leading to enhanced adjustment for male newcomers.

Of course, just because relationship building is prototypically communal does not mean that coworkers will always see it as such. Employees sometimes engage in positive acts like relationship building for instrumental reasons (Bolino, 1999), and other organizational members sometimes attribute the good deeds of their colleagues to agentic motives (Eastman, 1994). Indeed, relationship building during socialization has been conceptualized by some as a more agentic, proactive behavior (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011). As described above, according to social role theory, there is a normative injunction for women to be communal (i.e., other-oriented and modest) and to not engage in the agentic (i.e., self-focused, achievement-oriented) behaviors prescribed for men (Eagly, 1987). Considerable research has demonstrated that women who deviate from stereotypic communal expectations risk social and economic penalties (i.e., *backlash*; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Relationship building is likely sometimes seen as an agentic behavior because it involves taking initiative and exerting control over one's social environment (Dierdorff & Aguinis, 2018; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). In these cases, such efforts by female newcomers to build relationships with coworkers may have a negative or insignificant impact on their chances of obtaining social support for adjustment, as such actions may go against expected social norms for women.

But what about when coworkers see men's relationship building as agentic? Social role theory suggests that when male newcomers actively seek to build relationships with coworkers, it can greatly increase their chances of receiving social support that promotes learning and integration because their actions align with gender-stereotypical beliefs about men's social agency. For instance, there is evidence that males are considered more socially skilled, more hireable, and better leaders than females when they engage in agentic behaviors prescribed for men (e.g., Akinola, Martin, & Phillips, 2018; Heilman, 2001; Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Thus, regardless of whether relationship building by newcomers is viewed as communal or agentic, the positive indirect relationship between relationship building and newcomer adjustment is likely to be stronger for males compared to female newcomers.

Moreover, newcomers' gender may influence the degree to which relationship-building behavior positively relates to the level of instrumental support men and women receive from their coworkers because, as prior research suggests, men often engage in relationship-building activities with a focus on acquiring information or resources that are instrumental for their productivity and career success, whereas women are more likely to use it to establish emotional bonds with their coworkers (e.g., Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2017; Taylor et al., 2000). Therefore, we expect the positive associations between relationship-building behavior and newcomer adjustment outcomes will be stronger for men, granted that they are likely to acquire more instrumental support than women that enhances task mastery, role clarity, and social integration.

Hypothesis 2: Newcomer gender moderates the relationship between newcomer relationship building and coworker social support such that the relationship is more positive for male newcomers compared to females.

Hypothesis 3: Newcomer gender moderates the indirect relationships that newcomer relationship building has with (a) task mastery, (b) role clarity, and (c) social integration via coworker social support such that the indirect relationships are more positive for male newcomers compared to females.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In 2016, we collected three waves of data from new employees at a large university in the US. The initial survey was sent to 319 employees, 204 of whom completed it within their first 30 days of employment (i.e., a 64% response rate). Of these, 191 (94%) completed the second survey, and 183 (90%) completed all three. Eighty-two percent of the newcomers in our final sample self-identified as White ($n = 167$), and 64% were female ($n = 129$). Approximately 29% of participants had a bachelor's degree, 32% had a master's degree, and 27% had a doctorate. Thirteen percent of the participants were Assistant Professors, and the remaining 87% held a wide range of job titles, such as Accountant, Administrative Program Assistant, Analyst Programmer, Cashier, Custodian, HR Consultant, Laborer, Network Analyst, Office Specialist, Program Coordinator, and Staff Pharmacist. Consistent with prior socialization studies (e.g., Chan & Schmitt, 2000; Song, Liu, Shi, & Wang, 2017), we collected data from employees during their first month on the job (Time 1), at the end of their second month (Time 2), and at the end of their third month (Time 3).¹ The use of a three-month time frame is consistent with prior

¹ Following the procedures recommended by Goodman and Blum (1996), we examined whether participant attrition led to nonrandom sampling bias. We first used multiple logistic regression to assess the presence of nonrandom

research on newcomer socialization (e.g., Boswell, Shipp, Payne, & Culbertson, 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Simon, Bauer, Erdogan, & Shepard, 2019) and was chosen due to the widely held belief that the first 90 days are what matter most in onboarding and represent the most significant amount of change in newcomers' attitudes (Lance, Vandenberg, & Self, 2000; Watkins, 2003).

Measures

All survey items and rating scales are provided in Appendix A.

Newcomer relationship building (Time 1). Using Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller's (2000) three-item scale, we assessed the frequency of engaging in relationship building during the first 30 days of employment. A sample item is "Participated in social office events to meet people (e.g., parties, softball team, outings, clubs, lunches)." Cronbach's alpha was .73.

Coworker social support. Using Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg's (2003) seven-item scale, we assessed the frequency of receiving informational and instrumental social support from coworkers. A sample items is "My coworkers helped me adapt to my work environment." Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Task mastery. Task mastery was measured using a seven-item scale that Morrison (2002) developed. A sample item is "I have mastered the required tasks of my job." Cronbach's alpha was .75.

sampling bias. The dependent variables were categorical and distinguished between those who completed Survey 3 (stayers) and those who only completed Survey 1 (leavers). Results were nonsignificant for each independent variable: relationship building ($b = .44$, 95% CI: $-.040, .961$) and employee gender ($b = .41$, 95% CI: $-.699, 1.406$). Next, we used a t-test to examine the effects of attrition by comparing the means of leavers vs. stayers and found that the t-values were nonsignificant for both relationship building ($mean\ difference = -.56$, 95% CI: $-1.13, .012$) and employee gender ($mean\ difference = -.11$, 95% CI: $-.340, .126$). These findings indicate no significant nonrandom sampling bias due to participant attrition.

Role clarity. Role clarity was assessed using a six-item scale developed by Morrison (1993). A sample item is “I understand what all the duties of my job entail.” Cronbach’s alpha was .85.

Social integration. We measured social integration using a five-item scale from Morrison (1993). A sample item is “Within my work group, I would easily be identified as ‘one of the gang.’” Cronbach’s alpha was .88.

Control variable. Prior research in the socialization literature (e.g., Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000) has shown that extraversion positively relates to newcomers’ relationship building because extraverted people prefer to be in the company of other people most of the time and spend more of their time socializing compared to those with more introverted personalities. Therefore, we controlled for extraversion using the seven descriptive adjectives from Saucier’s (1994) scale—I see myself as someone who is: talkative, extroverted, bold, energetic, shy, quiet, bashful, and withdrawn. Responses ranged from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Because recent studies have also shown that newcomers’ level of education is positively related to proactive socialization behavior (e.g., Saeed et al., 2013) and negatively related to gender (e.g., Boulamatsi et al., 2020), we included it as a control variable to avoid potential problems in the interpretation of multiple regression coefficients due to meaningful CV-IV correlations (Carlson and Wu, 2012). Although we present our findings below with statistical controls, we note that our analyses yield the same pattern of results with or without them included in the model. However, the p-value for the interaction between relationship building and gender increases to $p = .056$ when predicting coworker support. Considering prior research has empirically linked extraversion and education to our independent variables, we followed Carlson and Wu’s (2012) recommendations and presented our findings

below with statistical controls included so that the resulting regression coefficients capture a more “purified” relationship between our predictors and outcomes. Because Carlson and Wu (2012) cautioned that “including CVs with unknown, nonzero associations with IVs has the potential to confound statistical controls (p. 419), we also confirmed that extraversion ($r = .20, p = .007$) and education ($r = .13, p = .077$) were indeed correlated with relationship building in the current study. Our analyses also revealed that education correlated negatively with gender ($r = -.16, p = .030$).

Analytic Strategy

Our data are hierarchical, with employees nested in 93 different departments across the organization. Since just a fraction of the departments in our sample had multiple employees participating in the study (with an average department size of 1.96; *median* = 1; *sd* = 1.86; *range* = 11), we initially calculated design effect scores [$1 + (\text{average group size} - 1) \text{ICC}(1)$] to determine the most appropriate method for data analysis (Heck & Thomas, 2015). The design effects for all variables fell below the conventional cutoff of 2.0, which suggests that single-level analyses are appropriate to test our hypotheses because the potential biases induced by group effects are negligible (Muthén & Satorra, 1995).²

To model multiple dependent variables simultaneously, we test our hypotheses with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression in Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The magnitude of the hypothesized indirect effects was calculated using the MODEL INDIRECT option within Mplus. Then we assessed the significance of indirect effects using a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to calculate confidence intervals around the estimated indirect effects as

² The intraclass correlations for the exogenous variables were .09 for social support, .02 for task mastery, .09 for role clarity, and .15 for social integration. Results from an unconditional null model suggest that the between-group variance was not significant for social support ($p = .63$), task mastery ($p = .85$), role clarity ($p = .59$), and social integration ($p = .37$). The within-group variance was significant for all variables.

recommended by Selig and Preacher (2008). Consistent with related research (e.g., Liao & Chuang, 2007), we also followed the recommendations of Aiken and West (1991) and grand mean centered the moderating variables before creating the interaction terms. To aid in interpreting findings, we reported unstandardized coefficients for all variables in our analyses. Dummy variables were created in which males were coded as 0 and females were coded as 1. Therefore, the regression coefficients for our continuous variables indicate the effects of a one-unit change, while the regression coefficients for the gender variable suggest the difference between male and female newcomers. Although our hypotheses are directional, the results reported below are based on two-tailed significant tests.

Results

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables, and Table 2 presents estimated path coefficients for all hypothesized direct effects. Figure 1 depicts the full moderated mediation model along with estimated path coefficients.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that coworker support mediates the positive indirect effect of newcomer relationship building on a newcomer (a) task mastery, (b) role clarity, and (c) social integration. Providing initial support for this prediction, our findings indicate that newcomer relationship building positively relates to coworker support (Model 1: $b = .12$; $p = .024$). Next, we tested mediation using a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to obtain 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The results did not support Hypothesis 1a (*indirect effect* = .01, 95% CI: -.005, .033), as instrumental support from coworkers did not predict task mastery (Model 1: $b = .08$; $p = .181$). In support of Hypothesis 1b, the indirect effect of relationship building on role clarity via coworker support, was significant (*indirect effect* = .03, 95% CI: .004, .070). We also

found support for Hypothesis 1c, as the relationship between newcomer relationship building and social integration was mediated by coworker support (*indirect effect* = .04, 95% CI: .005, .085).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that newcomer gender moderates the relationship between newcomer relationship building and coworker support. This interactive effect of relationship building and newcomer gender on coworker support was significant (Model 2: $b = -.25$; $p = .026$) and accounted for an additional three percent of explained variance in coworker support beyond Model 1 ($F_{1,177} = 4.70$, $p = .03$). As depicted in Figure 2, simple slope analyses indicated that relationship building positively related to the extent to which male newcomers garnered instrumental support from their coworkers ($b = .30$; $p = .002$), but this was not the case for female newcomers ($b = .04$; $p = .528$). Although the slope for female newcomers is slightly positive, we had expected that there would be a more substantial positive effect of relationship building on coworker support for female newcomers. Overall, these findings largely support Hypothesis 2,

Finally, Hypothesis 3 predicted that newcomer gender would moderate the positive indirect effect of newcomer relationship building on newcomer adjustment (via coworker support). Hypothesis 3a was not supported because the indirect effect of relationship building on task mastery (via coworker support) was not significant for male newcomers (*indirect effect* = .02, 95% CI: -.011, .070) or female newcomers (*indirect effect* = .00, 95% CI: -.009, .022). Correspondingly, we did not find support for the hypothesized gender difference in the indirect effects of relationship building on task mastery (*moderated mediation index* = -.02, 95% CI: -.066, .009). However, in support of Hypothesis 3b, the indirect effect of relationship building on role clarity (via coworker support) was positive and significant for male newcomers (*indirect effect* = .07, 95% CI: .021, .144) but not for female newcomers (*indirect effect* = .01, 95% CI: -

.023, .049), and the difference between these indirect effects was significant (*moderated mediation index* = -.06, 95% CI: -.138, -.006). Supporting Hypothesis 3c, the indirect effect of relationship building on social integration (via coworker support) was also significant for male newcomers (*indirect effect* = .09, 95% CI: .032, .172) but not for female newcomers (*indirect effect* = .01, 95% CI: -.029, .059), and the difference between these indirect effects was statistically significant (*moderated mediation index* = -.08, 95% CI: -.167, -.009). Hypothesis 3c was therefore supported.

Notably, our analyses revealed that the statistical controls (education and extraversion) did not explain a significant amount of variance in task mastery, role clarity, and social integration. The explained variance was approximately one percent for each of these dependent variables. Beyond the control variables, the predictor variables in our hypothesized model explained a significant amount of variance in role clarity ($\Delta R^2 = 8\%$; $F_{3,177} = 4.98$, $p = .00$) and social integration ($\Delta R^2 = 13\%$; $F_{3,177} = 9.50$, $p = .00$), but the additional variance explained was not significant for task mastery ($\Delta R^2 = 2\%$; $F_{3,177} = .91$, $p = .44$).

Discussion

In this paper, we made the case that while the social capital model of organizational socialization provides a powerful lens to understand the effects of newcomer relationship building on their subsequent adjustment, tests that include both phases of the model or its potential boundaries have been rare. We went on to explain that in the case of behavior like relationship building, the tenets of social role theory and its extensions indicate that the predictions made by the SCM will be stronger for male newcomers than their female peers. In a replicative test of the SCM, we found that the effects of newcomer relationship building were indeed transmitted to two forms of newcomer adjustment—role clarity and social integration, via

enhanced coworker social support. Additional testing revealed that, as predicted by social role theory, the relationships between newcomer relationship building and coworker social support and subsequent adjustment were contingent on the newcomer gender. For male newcomers, relationship building in the first month in a new role positively related to coworker social support in month two, as well as role clarity and social integration in month three. For female newcomers, their relationship building showed no significant effects on the social support they receive and their subsequent adjustment. In short, our results indicate that for new employees, efforts to build relationships during the first month in a new role may be more effective for men than for women.

In examining newcomer relationship building through the combined lens of the SCM and social role theory, our paper contributes meaningfully to our understanding of the dynamics of the socialization process, the influence of gender on socialization outcomes, and the intersection of socialization and employee diversity. First, our results extend the socialization literature by highlighting a boundary condition of the predictions made by the SCM (Fang et al., 2011). As predicted by this theory, we found evidence that relationship building created social capital for newcomers in the form of coworker support. However, the social capital garnered by this behavior was significant for men but not women. This finding provides some support for Fang et al.'s (2011) suggestions that individual differences play an important role in shaping the effects of proactive behaviors used by newcomers in their early months on the job.

Second, we broaden knowledge at the intersection of newcomer diversity and socialization processes. To the extent that the effect of demographics on newcomer socialization tactics has been examined, it has been as antecedents (Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012). For example, Kim et al. (2005) found that men are more likely to engage in relationship building

than women. Although we did not find gender differences in relationship building behavior (i.e., the correlation is not significant), we found that female newcomers did not benefit from their proactive efforts to build relationships with coworkers to the same extent that male newcomers did. According to theories of motivation, people's social behavior is motivated by the belief that it will result in specific outcomes and the value placed on them (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Viewed through this lens, it is possible that some women may eventually reduce their efforts to build relationships with coworkers as a way to conserve resources due to the perceived futility of their efforts and potential backlash. Considering that the frequency of coworker interactions significantly influences the rate at which newcomers adjust (Reichers, 1987), this would be unfortunate. In fact, coworker relations are considered the most vital factor in fostering newcomer adjustment (Bauer et al., 2007; Louis et al., 1983; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Furthermore, by demonstrating how newcomer gender may influence the organizational socialization process, our findings might help to explain how women's careers get held back right from the beginning (Dwivedi, Joshi, & Misangyi, 2018; Huang et al., 2019).

Limitations and Future Directions

We tested our hypotheses in a field study using a sample of new employees, and we separated the measurements in our three-stage model across the corresponding first three months of participants' organizational tenure. Despite the theoretical and empirical strengths of this approach, our work has limitations that point to important questions for future research. First, testing each stage of our model at one-month intervals precluded us from examining the extent to which newcomer engagement in relationship building, the receipt of social support, and newcomer adjustment occur iteratively, or perhaps even simultaneously. We therefore see an opportunity for researchers to deepen our understanding of how these relationships unfold by

examining newcomer behavior, coworker reactions, and newcomer adjustment at multiple time points across and beyond, the first 90 days of employment.

Second, we tested our hypotheses using employees from various departments across a large organization (i.e., university). Because we did not collect data related to different attributes of these departments, there may be variance between these groups that influenced our findings in ways that represent opportunities to test the robustness and boundaries of our predictions. For example, newcomer relationship building and social support might differ for females in predominantly female departments compared to those in predominantly male departments. Moreover, one of our relationship building survey items related to participating in social events, but the ability for newcomers to engage in this behavior will be limited to the extent to which their workgroup holds such events.

Third, the current data did not allow us to empirically investigate why gender moderates the link between newcomers' relationship-building behavior and the receipt of instrumental support from coworkers. Drawing on social role theory and prior research, we reasoned that male (compared to female) newcomers' relationship-building behavior is more likely to be attended to and viewed positively when perceived as communal because it is incongruent (vs. congruent) with gender-based communal prescriptions; on the other hand, when efforts to build relationships with coworkers are viewed as agentic behavior, males are likely to gain more instrumental benefits than females because proactive relationship-building behavior would align with (rather than violate) agency proscriptions. Our theorizing also suggests that gender differences in how newcomers' relationship-building behavior relates to coworker social support may emerge because men's social interactions tend to be more instrumental. In contrast, women often engage in relationship-building activities to forge emotional bonds (Taylor et al., 2000). However, future

research could more directly examine our social role theory-based reasons why gender may influence the effectiveness of proactive relationship-building behavior. This could involve exploring whether it is due to violations of gender expectations (agency proscriptions) or conforming to gender norms (communal prescriptions) that explain more of the moderating effect of newcomer gender on coworker social support and subsequent adjustment. Indeed, it may be that there is a three-way interaction between relationship building, gender, and gender role expectations or norms, the nature of which could provide a more nuanced understanding of why and how gender affects the socialization process and its outcomes.

Another limitation of our study is that we focused on a single social category—gender. As Rosette, de Leon, Koval, and Harrison (2018) point out, people do not view themselves through the lens of just one social category. Instead, they experience the multiple categories to which they belong at the same time, intersectionally. In particular, prior work suggests that the interplay of gender and race can create unique opportunities and constraints for women of different racial backgrounds (Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Salter, Sawyer, & Gebhardt, 2021). However, our sample was primarily composed of White employees; as such, it did not allow us to investigate how the effects of race might intersect with those of gender, with implications for socialization outcomes. Despite the challenges of researching racial discrimination in the workplace (Ruggs, Hebl, Law, Cox, Roehling, & Wiener, 2013), we encourage future research to examine whether social categories such as gender and race intersect to shape socialization outcomes for newcomers. For example, proactive behaviors such as initiating social interactions or attending social office events to meet coworkers and share individualized information may help Black women counter stereotypes of low interpersonal warmth and, consequently, increase the rate at which they adjust to a new work environment. Likewise, although Asian individuals

may behave in more introverted ways than individuals from more extroverted cultures (Fiske, Xu, & Cuddy, 1999), seeking opportunities to build relationships with coworkers may counter stereotypic expectations and lead to positive socialization outcomes.

Our findings did not support our SCM-based prediction that relationship building would indirectly positively relate to task mastery for newcomers. Taking care not to overinterpret these null findings, it is worth taking a step back and asking why the coworker support stemming from newcomer relationship building would positively relate to subsequent role clarity and social integration but not task mastery. This finding aligns with those of other studies which have shown relative weak or null relationships between newcomer social behavior during onboarding and task mastery or task performance (Ashford & Black, 1996; Gruman et al., 2006; Ostroff & Koslowski, 1992; Zhao, Liu, Zawacki, Michel, & Li, 2023). These results, as well as ours, likely stem from the inherently social nature of relationship building, which relates to coworker support that is also social in nature. Viewed from this social perspective, it makes some sense that such social support from coworkers would help employees socially integrate into their work groups and understand their professional place within the group more than it would facilitate the mastery of their work tasks.

Another important direction for future research is to explore potential moderators and boundary conditions that influence the impact of gender (and other social categories) on socialization outcomes. This could guide the development of more effective training programs aimed at improving socialization for all employees. Perhaps, females who employ social identity-based impression management strategies to manage the impact of stereotypic gender expectations on others' perceptions of their character (Roberts, 2005) are rewarded when they also actively seek out opportunities to build relationships with experienced organizational

members. It also stands to reason that female newcomers who are high in proactive personality or extraversion may be more persistent and overt in their relationship-building efforts, with this extra effort leading to similar benefits that their male counterparts have the privilege of accessing without putting in any extra effort. However, it is important to acknowledge that addressing gender bias should not be the responsibility of those experiencing it when engaging in relationship-building behavior. Future research should explore how organizational socialization tactics (e.g., individualized versus institutionalized) and other contextual factors (e.g., gender composition of workgroups, the prevalence of relationship-building opportunities) influence the impact of gender (and other social characteristics) on how organizational members evaluate and respond to newcomers' proactive socialization behavior.

Practical Implications

Our theorizing and findings have meaningful practical implications for managers, HR professionals, and workers. Our primary finding that relationship building positively relates to two important forms of newcomer adjustment is noteworthy in light of the reality that “longstanding research has shown that most turnover occurs among new hires who face difficulty adjusting to the job” (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017: 540). As such, our findings suggest that activities that facilitate relationship building between new hires and current employees will yield dividends in terms of reduced turnover (via increased adjustment). This type of relationship building may be complicated to stimulate in virtual environments. Indeed, recent research suggests that one drawback of remote working for early career professionals is that it restricts interaction between junior workers and their senior colleagues (Emanuel, Harrington, & Pallais, 2023). Thus, managers in these settings would be wise to invest in developing virtual ways for new workers to build bonds with their veteran colleagues, or

incentivize junior and senior workers to come together in person occasionally to socialize and build relationships.

An implication of our finding that relationship building only yielded positive socialization outcomes for men is that leaders should be attentive to providing additional means via which female newcomers can access the social support that fuels newcomer adjustment. For example, organizations can develop formal support-providing programs (e.g., mentoring programs) specifically targeting female newcomers. In addition, the socialization process begins before organizational entry (Saks & Gruman, 2012), and so those who manage the hiring process can develop mechanisms that foster newcomer relationship building (especially for women) during the anticipatory socialization period. Finally, onboarding programs sometimes only last weeks or months, which is why our study focused on the first 90 days of employment. However, some organizations have begun to extend these programs to a full year (Carucci, 2018), and doing so may help to erase the disadvantage that our results highlighted when it comes to relationship building and socialization outcomes for females. Thus, we encourage future research that examines the effect of onboarding program length on socialization outcomes, especially in relation to newcomer gender.

Conclusion

The social capital model of organizational socialization provides a powerful and useful explanation for how newcomer behaviors affect the extent to which they adjust to their new organization. In this paper, we used social role theory to highlight one possible limitation of the SCM's predictive power related to gender. Our subsequent test of this theory and this boundary condition indicated that the SCM is more useful for explaining the socialization experiences of male newcomers compared to female newcomers. In highlighting this gender-based caveat, our

paper extends our understanding of the socialization process and the influence of newcomer diversity on it and provides practitioners with insight concerning how to enhance the effectiveness of their onboarding programs, especially for female newcomers.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Extraversion	2.93	.38							
2. Education	8.99	1.56	.02						
3. Newcomer gender	0.66	0.48	-.02	-.16*					
4. Relationship building	3.42	1.09	.20**	.13 [†]	.09				
5. Coworker social support	3.94	0.82	.00	-.08	-.01	.15*			
6. Task mastery	3.84	0.68	.12	-.03	-.06	.05	.11		
7. Role clarity	3.91	0.76	.05	-.09	-.08	.03	.27**	.65**	
8. Social integration	3.77	0.79	.07	.03	-.07	.14 [†]	.36**	.41**	.50**

Note. $N = 183$. Gender is coded as “0” for male newcomers and coded as “1” for female newcomers. The abbreviations “M” and “SD” are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. Correlations represent employee-level (Level 1) bivariate correlations. † indicates $p < .10$, * indicates $p < .05$, and ** indicates $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 2

Unstandardized Regression Coefficients from the Hypothesized Path Models

Variable	Coworker Support		Task Mastery		Role Clarity		Social Integration	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	4.71**	4.56**	3.13**	3.71**	2.96**	3.23**	2.29**	2.54**
Predictors	(.61)	(.38)	(.58)	(.42)	(.66)	(.48)	(.61)	(.44)
Extraversion	-.06	-.09	.20	.20	.10	.10	.09	.09
	(.16)	(.16)	(.13)	(.13)	(.15)	(.15)	(.14)	(.14)
Education	-.06	-.06	-.02	-.02	-.04	-.04	.02	.02
	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)
Newcomer gender	-.09	-.10	-.09	-.09	-.15	-.15	-.10	-.10
	(.13)	(.13)	(.11)	(.11)	(.12)	(.12)	(.11)	(.11)
Relationship building	.13*	.30**	.01	.01	.00	.00	.06	.06
	(.06)	(.09)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Gender × Relationship building		-.25*						
		(.11)						
Mediator								
Coworker support			.08	.08	.25**	.25**	.32**	.32**
			(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)
Indirect effects of relationship building								
Average indirect effect			.01		.03*		.04*	
Male newcomers				.02		.07*		.09*
Female newcomers				.00		.01		.01
Index of moderated mediation				-.02		-.06*		-.08*

Note. $N = 183$. Gender is coded as “0” for male newcomers and coded as “1” for female newcomers. Values in parentheses indicate the standard error for each coefficient. * indicates $p < .05$, and ** indicates $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Figure 1

Theoretical model and results of the current research

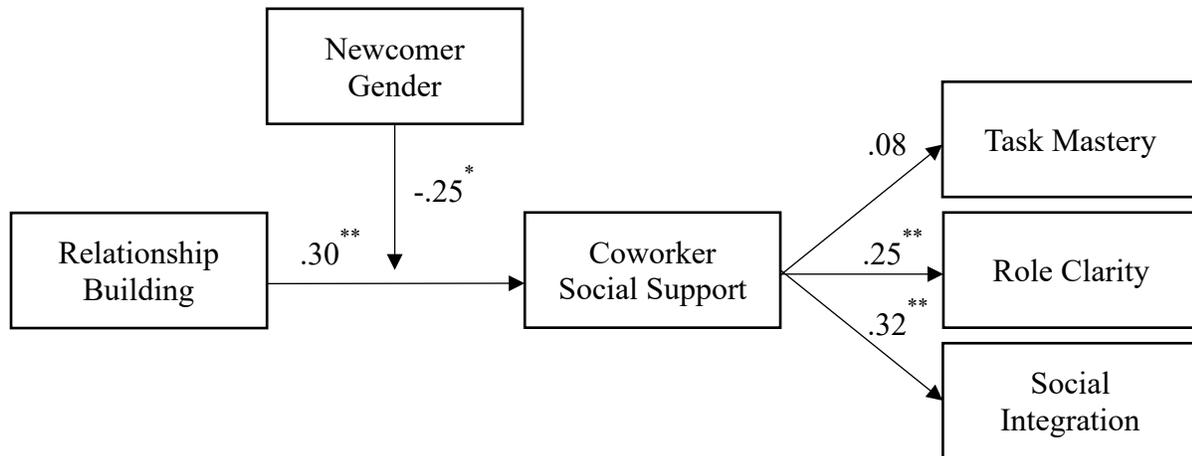
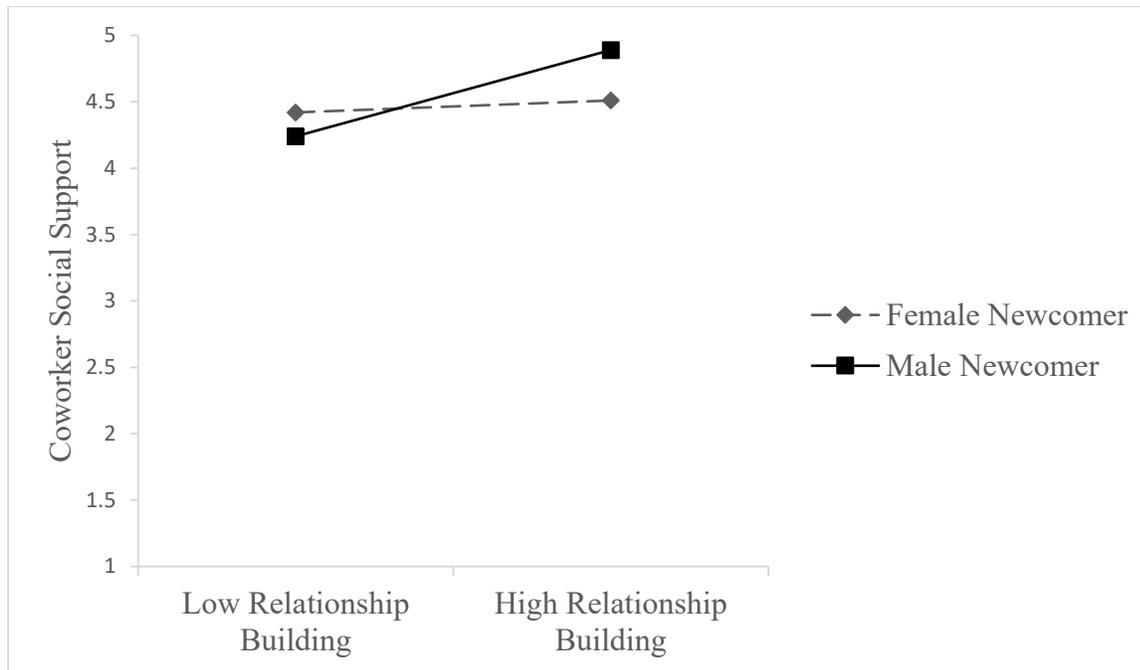


Figure 2

The interactive effect of relationship building and gender on coworker social support



Appendix A

Relationship Building - Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller (2000)

1= Never; 2 = Less than once in last 30 days, 3 = Once in last 30 days; 4 = 2-3 times in last 30 days; 5 = Once a week

1. Participated in social office events to meet people (e.g., parties, softball team, outings, clubs, lunches).
2. Attended company social gatherings.
3. Tried to socialize and get to know your coworkers.

Coworker Social Support - Kammeyer-Mueller and Wanberg (2003)

1= Never behave this way; 2 = Very rarely behave this way, 3 = Occasionally behave this way; 4 = Sometimes behave this way; 5 = Often behave this way

1. My coworkers shared task-related knowledge and resources with me.
2. My coworkers affected my ideas about appropriate behaviors for my job, work group, and organization.
3. My coworkers provided guidance as to how I should perform my job.
4. My coworkers helped me understand what is most important to learn.
5. My coworkers helped me adapt to my work environment.
6. My coworkers affected my ideas about appropriate attitudes and norms for my job, work group, and organization.
7. My coworkers provided guidance as to how I should act in my work environment.

Task Mastery - Morrison (2002)

1= Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

1. I am confident about the adequacy of my job skills and abilities.
2. I feel competent conducting my job assignments.
3. It seems to take me longer than planned to complete my job assignments.
4. I rarely make mistakes when conducting my job assignments.
5. I have learned how to successfully perform my job in an efficient manner.
6. I have mastered the required tasks of my job.
7. I understand what all the duties of my job entail.

Role Clarity - Morrison (1993)

1= Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

1. I feel certain about how much authority I have.
2. I have clear, planned objectives for my job.
3. I know that I have divided my time properly.
4. I know what my responsibilities are.
5. I know exactly what is expected of me.

6. I receive clear explanations of what has to be done.

Social Integration - Morrison (1993)

1= Strongly disagree; 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Strongly agree

1. My co-workers seem to accept me as one of them.
2. I feel comfortable around my co-workers.
3. Within my work group, I would easily be identified as 'one of the gang.
4. I am pretty popular in the organization.
5. I believe most of my coworkers like me.

Education Level

1. No schooling completed
2. Nursery school to 8th grade
3. Some high school, no diploma
4. High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
5. Some college credit, no degree
6. Trade/technical/vocational training
7. Associate degree
8. Bachelor's degree
9. Master's degree
10. Professional degree
11. Doctorate degree