Socialization Tactics, Employee Proactivity, and Person–Organization Fit

Tae-Yeol Kim and Daniel M. Cable
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Sang-Pyo Kim
Jinju National University

This study examined the linkage between organizational socialization tactics and person–organization (P-O) fit and examined the moderating influence of employees' proactivity behaviors. Results from a sample of 279 employee–supervisor pairs from 7 organizations in South Korea revealed a positive relationship between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit perceptions. However, the association between firms' socialization tactics and P-O fit was facilitated or negated by several proactive behaviors that employees used to gain control over their environment. For example, employees' positive framing harmonized with institutional tactics to create higher P-O fit, whereas employees who proactively developed strong relationships with their supervisors essentially replaced institutionalized socialization tactics.

Organizations often try to develop workforce flexibility and commitment by instilling person–organization (P-O) fit, which refers to the compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991; Kristof, 1996; Schneider, 1987). Although a growing research stream has examined how interviewers inculcate P-O fit (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994; Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993; Cable & Judge, 1996, 1997; Judge & Ferris, 1992; Parsons, Cable, & Wilkerson, 1999; Rynes & Gerhart, 1990), less research has focused on how P-O fit is developed through socialization processes (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Socialization is fundamental to P-O fit because the primary goals of socialization are to ensure the continuity of central values and to provide new employees with a framework for responding to their work environment and for coordinating with other employees (Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). To the extent that socialization processes result in P-O fit, employees are more likely to be committed to the organization and are less likely to quit, which ensures that firms receive greater returns on investments in recruitment, selection, and training (Kristof, 1996). However, as Bauer, Morrison, and Callister (1998) noted, "it is surprising that only a few studies have focused on how newcomers learn about and internalize cultural norms and values, particularly since socialization has been conceptualized as one of the primary ways in which organizational culture is transmitted and maintained" (p. 162).

One study that investigated the linkage between socialization tactics and P-O fit is Cable and Parsons (2001). Cable and Parsons found that employees experienced greater P-O fit when firms used highly institutionalized socialization tactics, that is, a systematic, planned set of activities designed by the organization to reduce ambiguity for employees. Theoretically, by offering structured early work experiences that reduce ambiguity, organizations encourage employees to passively accept established roles, thereby reinforcing the status quo (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Bauer et al., 1998; Jones, 1986). Low-institutionalized socialization tactics, however, reflect an absence of structure that creates ambiguity and encourages employees to examine and challenge the status quo and to develop their own approaches to their roles and situations (Bauer et al., 1998; Jones, 1986).

Although Cable and Parsons (2001) established a linkage between institutionalized socialization tactics and employees' P-O fit, at least two important questions remain unaddressed. First, the existing socialization tactics literature has focused on how organizations process newcomers in order to manage adjustment and innovation (e.g., Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). However, the assumption that organizations have control during organizational entry has been challenged by proactivity research that has shown that employees can also play an important role in the organizational entry process by seeking information and networking with insiders to fit with the norms and culture (Ashford & Black, 1996; Bauer & Green, 1998; Griffin, Colella, & Goparaju, 2000; Morrison, 1993; Webber & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). Because research shows that some employees are more proactive during socialization than are others (Ashford & Black, 1996; Crant, 2000), the effects of firms' socialization tactics on P-O fit may be moderated by employee proactivity. Moreover, there are different dimensions of proactivity (e.g., positive framing, sense making, and relationship building), and these components may have contradictory effects. Thus, the people processing and proactivity perspectives offer important, complementary perspectives on what goes on during organizational entry. One goal of our article is to bring these complementary perspectives together in a single study.

Second, no research has examined how socialization tactics affect P-O fit outside the United States, even though elements of socialization tactics that are effective in one national culture may lead to different outcomes or may even be inappropriate in another country. For example, considerable evidence suggests that Asian cultures are more team oriented than the United States' culture (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Triandis, 1995). More-
over, research has shown that in Asian cultures such as that of South Korea, organizations place high emphasis on human resource policies that develop employee cohesiveness (Lee, 1998; Park, Youn, & Lim, 1999). Accordingly, it is possible that in Asia the effects of socialization tactics on P-O fit are overwhelmed by the cumulative impact of national culture and human resource practices that emphasize cohesiveness. Even though existing socialization theory is not explicitly culture bound and implies that the uncertainty-reducing qualities of institutional socialization tactics should travel across national cultures, it is possible that socialization tactics have different effects in Asian countries than in the United States (Bauer et al., 1998). Thus, a second contribution of the present study is cross-validation of the linkage between socialization tactics and P-O fit in an Asian national culture, specifically in South Korea.

In summary, it is important to examine the extent to which employees’ proactivity heightens or dampens the relationship between firms’ socialization tactics and employees’ P-O fit, and it is valuable to cross-validate the effects of socialization tactics on P-O fit in a non-U.S. national culture. To achieve these ends, we examined the moderating role of employee proactivity in seven South Korean organizations.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Below, we review the logic of how institutionalized socialization tactics should affect P-O fit perceptions, which we define as employees’ subjective beliefs about how well their personal values match the organizational culture (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Kristof, 1996). Then we discuss the effects of employees’ proactivity on the linkage between socialization and P-O fit perceptions.

Socialization Tactics and P-O Fit

When new employees join an organization, they often experience reality shock for three reasons (Jones, 1986; Louis, 1980; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). First, they must cope with differences between their expectations and the reality they face. Second, new employees do not possess comfortable routines for interacting with and predicting the responses of others and often must reevaluate their assumptions about how people respond to events. Finally, the specific contributions expected from new employees are often unclear upon entry, such that they initially lack identification with their job and the activities going on around them. Thus, new employees face considerable ambiguity upon entry into a new organization, and their anxiety about performance and fitting in is often high. How organizations treat individuals in the first few months of working in a new environment sends clear signals to new employees about what is expected of them and how well they fit into the organization (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Thus, organizations’ socialization practices—or “people processing” tactics (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979)—are an important predictor of how employees respond and adjust to their new environment (Jones, 1986).

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of an organization’s socialization process is the extent to which it is designed to reduce the ambiguity that employees face after joining the organization. Some firms use highly institutionalized socialization tactics (Jones, 1986) that reduce ambiguity for new employees by providing them with a common set of learning experiences and off-the-job training, rather than forcing them to “sink or swim” on the new job and exposing each of them to unique experiences. A highly institutionalized socialization process also offers new employees explicit information about the sequence and timing of activities they will go through in their new environment. For example, a highly institutionalized process shares information about the company’s career ladders and job rotation plans for the first few years on the job. Finally, a highly institutionalized process gives new employees positive social support and exposure to experienced organizational members, rather than holding newcomers at arm’s length until they begin to fulfill expectations. Thus, a highly institutionalized process might offer new employees a mentor program in which insiders serve as role models and help newcomers adjust.

As described in the introduction, the goal of highly institutionalized socialization tactics is to remove much of the uncertainty inherent in early work experiences, instead of exacerbating uncertainty (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Bauer et al., 1998). Employees receive a common message about the organization’s values and how they should interpret and respond to situations (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1998; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Given that newcomers seek order at this early stage in their employment relationship (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), we expected to substantiate Cable and Parsons’s (2001) finding that highly institutionalized socialization tactics are positively related to newcomers’ P-O fit perceptions. Conversely, low-institutionalized socialization tactics create ambiguity and should encourage employees to challenge the status quo and develop their own approaches to their situations, which may lead to higher job innovation but lower P-O fit (Bauer et al., 1998; Jones, 1986).

Although there is valuable parsimony in theorizing about firms’ socialization tactics on a single dimension (high vs. low institutionalization), it should be noted that socialization tactics can also be conceptualized at a more fine-grained level of detail. In fact, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) originally proposed six different socialization tactics. Jones’s (1986) framework grouped these six tactics into three factors on a single institutionalization continuum. Given the high positive intercorrelations between the socialization tactics, as well as the fact that the socialization tactics influenced employee outcomes (such as role orientation and job satisfaction) in similar ways (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jones, 1986), researchers have used the single continuum to predict outcomes (e.g., Ashforth et al., 1998; Bauer et al., 1998; Lueke & Svanytek, 2000). Although it is possible that Van Maanen and Schein’s original six socialization tactics might emerge as independent with a different scale (Bauer et al., 1998), in the present study we used Jones’s scale and used a single dimension of socialization tactics (high vs. low institutionalization) to reflect a systematic, planned set of activities to reduce ambiguity and help employees adjust to the organization.

In summary, although most of the empirical research on socialization has been conducted in the United States (Ashforth et al., 1998; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Jones, 1986), the logic behind the prediction is not culture bound and should cross-validate in Asian countries. For example, in their United States–Hong Kong comparison study on organizational socialization, Taormina and Bauer (2000) found general similarities across countries in terms of the effects of organizational socialization on job satisfaction and or-
ganizational commitment. Thus, we expected institutionalized socialization tactics to be positively related to employees’ P-O fit.

**Hypothesis 1:** Institutionalized socialization tactics are positively correlated with South Korean employees’ P-O fit perceptions.

The Moderating Role of Proactivity

As described above, the process of moving into an organization has far-reaching effects on most people because new employees do not understand the norms and expectations, and they often lack identification with the activities going on around them (Bauer et al., 1998; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The process of joining an organization is thus associated with lack of control and mastery for most people (Ashford & Black, 1996). This state often leads to stress and anxiety because people have a general need for control and predictability (Ashford & Black, 1996; Fisher, 1986; White, 1959). The gap between individuals’ motivation for perceived control and relative uncontrollability of entry situations provides employees with a motivation for action (Ashford & Black, 1996; Greenberger & Strasser, 1986; Reichers, 1987). Therefore, most people undertake some action to regain control and to understand their new environmental expectations. However, research suggests that employees vary in their proactivity after joining organizations, such that individuals with greater desire for control become much more active in the socialization process (Black & Ashford, 1995; Crant, 2000). Ashford and Black (1996) discussed three general types of employee proactivity, which we examine in the present study: positive framing (interpreting the environment positively), sense making (seeking out information and feedback), and relationship building (general socializing, networking, and building relationships—boss).³

Employee proactivity has important implications for the effects of firms’ socialization tactics. Although firms may implement different types of people-processing activities in order to socialize and manage employees in certain ways (Bauer et al., 1998; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), employees’ proactivity may affect the socialization process. For example, a firm may attempt to engender creativity and innovation through low-institutionalized socialization tactics, but this tactic may not be effective for proactive individuals who seek out information and embed themselves socially into the organization. From this perspective, employee proactivity may moderate the relationship between socialization tactics and P-O fit.

Although existing research on the role of individual differences in the socialization process remains sparse (Ashford & Black, 1996; Saks, 1995), Jones (1986) found that the effects of socialization tactics were moderated by individuals’ self-efficacy, and Saks (1995) found similar results for training efforts during entry. Moreover, Ashford and Black (1996) found individual differences between employees’ desire for control and the types of proactive activities they engaged in during entry. Next, we discuss the general types of proactive behaviors that employees use, and we propose hypotheses about their likely effect on the linkage between organizations’ socialization tactics and employees’ P-O fit.

**Positive framing.** One way to increase perceived control of the environment is to interpret events in the environment as supportive rather than antagonistic. Viewing work as a challenge rather than as a threat is a coping mechanism that allows employees to feel proactive and able to succeed in their new environments (Ashford & Black, 1996). For example, Taylor and Brown (1988) discussed how positive cognitive frames benefited individuals in terms of stress levels, recovery from illness, and capability for creative and productive work. In a similar vein, Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller (2000) found that new hires who tried to look at the positive side of things were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs several months after starting. Ashford and Black (1996) found that positive framing was significantly related to newcomers’ performance and job satisfaction.

Not everyone applies positive frames to interpret their new environments, however, and we expected individual differences in proactivity to affect the link between institutionalized socialization tactics and employees’ P-O fit. Specifically, we hypothesized that the effect of positive framing on the relation between socialization and P-O fit would be harmonizing, such that the highest P-O fit results when employees apply positive framing and firms provide structure, common messages, and social models about the organization’s values. Theoretically, when employees prepare themselves with positive frames, they are likely to perceive an organization’s institutionalized activities as positive and helpful rather than overbearing, paternalistic, and mass-produced. Rather than interpret institutionalized activities as controlling and brainwashing, they are likely to be receptive to the information provided about the organization’s norms and values and to feel comforted rather than cynical about the structure and direction provided by socialization activities. Positive framing should therefore help employees interpret information offered during socialization in ways that help them adapt to the firm’s values. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 2:** Positive framing moderates the relationship between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit, such that employees applying positive frames to institutionalized tactics will experience the highest P-O fit whereas institutionalized tactics will not be related to P-O fit for employees who apply negative frames.

**Sense making.** Sense making, which refers to information seeking and feedback seeking, is a second way that employees can be proactive in terms of dealing with their environments and the inevitable surprises that occur (Ashford & Black, 1996). As employees gain information about their work setting and the social expectations that exist and gain feedback on their own performance and activities, they are able to reduce uncertainty and learn their place in the organization (Miller & Jable, 1991). Thus, employees who respond to organizational surprises with increased information-seeking and feedback-seeking behaviors learn more about the organizational values and how to adapt to those values.

We predicted that proactive sense making would have a replacement effect on the relationship between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit, such that institutionalized
tactics would be unrelated to P-O fit for employees who engage in proactive sense making. One of the primary goals of institutionalized tactics is to proffer information about the organization, including norms, expectations, and standards (Bauer et al., 1998; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In other words, the major reason firms use institutionalized tactics is to remove some of the uncertainty of a new environment by offering information that guides employees’ behaviors. To the extent that some employees take it upon themselves to seek and obtain this information themselves, they preempt a major element of the institutionalized socialization process.

**Hypothesis 3:** Sense making moderates the relationship between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit, such that institutionalized tactics will be positively related to P-O fit for employees who do not engage in proactive sense making but will be unrelated to P-O fit for employees who gather their own information.

**Relationship building.** Some people are more likely than others to seek out interaction opportunities when they enter a work situation (Morrison, 2002; Reichers, 1987). Proactive relationship-building behaviors might include networking (e.g., stopping by other people’s offices to talk about a project), build relationships—boss (e.g., joining the supervisor for lunch or asking questions about his or her background), and general socializing (e.g., participating in an organization’s formal social activities, such as office parties). Theoretically, these social interaction behaviors can be useful to employees because they help convey organizational tactics (Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993, 2002; Reichers, 1987).

We expected proactive relationship building to replace the linkage between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit. Institutionalized socialization affects employees, in part, because it increases social comfort and understanding of organizational norms by encouraging interactions with experienced organizational members who offer positive social support (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Jones, 1986). Thus, institutionalized socialization tactics reduce employee anxiety by encouraging a sense of community and information sharing. To the extent that employees build their own social networks by developing a relationship with their supervisor, creating peer networks across departments, and becoming a part of formal social activities, they then remove ambiguity and increase their comfort with others in the organization (Morrison, 2002). Thus, we expected the positive link between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit to be lower for employees who proactively engage in their own relationship-building activities.

**Hypothesis 4:** Relationship building will moderate the linkage between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit, such that institutionalized tactics will be positively related to P-O fit for employees who do not engage in relationship building but will be unrelated to P-O fit for employees who proactively develop relationships.

**Participants and Procedures**

As noted in the introduction, a contribution of this study is the examination of the role of socialization tactics in an Asian cultural setting. Moreover, to study the effect of socialization tactics on P-O fit, we felt it was necessary to obtain data that varied in terms of socialization tactics. To these ends, we examined relatively new employees across job types and job levels in seven large organizations in South Korea. The organizations included two financial security companies, two hospitals, one advertising company, and two manufacturing companies. Not surprisingly, the seven organizations had different cultures and expectations, ranging from the stability and long-term employment of the financial security companies, to the creative focus and shorter average tenure of the advertising company, to the predictability and quality needed by the hospitals and the manufacturing companies. Sang-Pyo Kim obtained the participation of these seven organizations on the basis of a list of companies that cooperate with his university. He contacted the top management in each organization, and all agreed to participate in the study under the condition that they received copies of the results.

First, top-level managers at each company compiled lists of the employees who had joined the organization between 3 months and 2 years ago, as well as lists of the immediate supervisors of this group. According to the final list of dyads, a total of 506 new employee–supervisor pairs existed in the seven organizations, all of whom were invited to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of the anonymity of their responses. Participating employees and their supervisors completed a questionnaire at work during company time. In the survey, employees reported the socialization tactics that they had experienced since joining their organization and also reported the fit between their personal values and the organizations’ cultural values. Supervisors reported their subordinates’ proactive behaviors.

A total of 283 employee–supervisor pair questionnaires were returned (56% response rate, ranging from 46% to 100% by organization). Four pairs were excluded because of missing data, leaving a total of 279 paired responses for the analyses. Fifty-seven percent of the employees were women, and 43% were men. Employees’ average age was 26.6 years (SD = 3.6), average job tenure was 13.0 months (SD = 6.6), and average number of employees per organization was 1,459 people (SD = 916). For the supervisors, 47% were women, 53% were men, average age was 39.1 years (SD = 5.7), and average time working with the subordinate was 11.1 months (SD = 6.1).

**Measures**

Surveys were initially written in English and translated into South Korean using the procedure recommended by Brislin (1986). Specifically, all translators were blind to the study’s hypotheses, and two bilingual individuals independently translated the survey from English to South Korean. There was 94% agreement between the translators regarding word choice and expression. A third bilingual individual translated the survey back to English. During this procedure, 13 words or phrases in the South Korean version that were not exactly matched to the English version were back-translated into English, in accordance with the recommendation of Brislin. All of the variables in this study were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree or to no extent and 7 = strongly agree or to a great extent)

**Institutionalized socialization tactics.** We used Jones’s (1986) 30-item scale of institutionalized socialization tactics, for which participating employees were asked to report the degree to which they experienced different socialization tactics since they started to work at the organization. Example items include “I have been through a set of training experiences which are specifically designed to give newcomers a thorough knowledge of job related skills,” “Almost all of my colleagues have been supportive of me...
personally,” and “The steps in the career ladder are clearly specified in this organization.” Consistent with Cable and Parsons (2001), four items were not used because of their high positive correlations with each other and negative correlations with other items in the factor (i.e., the items that were removed were “Most of my training has been carried out apart from other newcomers,” “Much of my job knowledge has been acquired informally on a trial and error basis,” “I have had to change my attitudes and values to be accepted in this organization,” and “I have little or no access to people who have previously performed my role in this organization”). The remaining 26 items were added to form a composite (e.g., Ashforth et al., 1998). A higher score on the composite indicates a systematic, planned set of activities designed by the organization to reduce ambiguity for employees.

**Proactive behaviors.** Supervisors rated the degree to which their subordinates engaged in various proactive behaviors since starting to work at the organization. We adopted Ashford and Black’s (1996) 24-item scale of proactive behaviors and reworded some of the items because we assessed the proactive behaviors via supervisor report rather than subordinates’ self-report (e.g., changing the referent from “you” to “his or her”). The proactive behavior scale included items that assessed positive framing (e.g., “tried to look on the bright side of things”); sense making–information seeking (e.g., “tried to learn the important policies and procedures in the company”); sense making–feedback seeking (e.g., “sought feedback on his or her performance after assignments”); sense making–general socializing (e.g., “attended company social gatherings”); relationship building with supervisor (e.g., “worked hard to get to know his or her boss”); and relationship building–networking (e.g., “started conversations with people from different segments of the company”). To examine the factor structure of the proactive items, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis with maximum likelihood extraction and oblique rotation. Using a .40 criterion for the loadings, we found that Ashford and Black’s six-factor solution emerged except for one item. Specifically, an item to measure information seeking (i.e., “tried to learn the unofficial structure”) did not load highly on any factor and thus was deleted in the subsequent analyses.

**P-O fit.** Employees reported their subjective P-O fit by responding to Cable and DeRue’s (2002) three-item scale. The three items are “My organization’s values and culture provide a good fit with the things that I value in life,” “The things that I value in life are very similar to the things that my organization values,” and “My personal values match my organization’s values and culture.”

**Control variables.** Following Cable and Parsons (2001), we controlled for several relevant factors to better estimate the effect sizes of the hypothesized variables. Specifically, we measured and controlled for employees’ gender, age, and tenure (dummy-coded in 3-month segments), as well as organizational size.

**Analyses**

We used hierarchical multiple regression analyses to test our hypotheses regarding the direct relationships between socialization tactics and P-O fit, as well as the moderating effects of proactive behaviors. The socialization tactics and proactive behavior scales were centered at their means before we computed interactions or conducted analyses (Aiken & West, 1991). To examine any significant interaction effects more closely, we plotted the simple slopes of the socialization tactics–P-O fit regression at one standard deviation below the mean and at one standard deviation above the mean of each proactive behavior, and we tested whether each slope was statistically significant, according to Aiken and West’s recommendation.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics, reliability estimates, and correlations for all measures are reported in Table 1. The mean for institutionalized socialization tactics was relatively high (i.e., 4.57 out of 7), which indicated that this group of employees experienced somewhat institutionalized socialization processes on average. However, data also revealed considerable variance in socialization tactics (i.e., $SD = 0.67$).

We surveyed employees in many job types and job levels in this study, and it is likely that different types of employees experience different socialization. However, employees within an organization should experience more similar socialization than should employees between organizations. To examine this issue in the present study, we conducted an analysis of variance with the socialization tactics as a dependent variable and the seven organizations as the independent variables. Results revealed that the variance in socialization tactic experiences between firms was significantly larger than the variance in socialization tactic experiences within each firm, $F(6, 272) = 7.30, p < .01$. Likewise, analysis showed that socialization tactics were significantly related to organizations ($r = .19, p < .01$), providing additional evidence for organization-specific tactics.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervisors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive framing</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Feedback seeking</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Information seeking</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. General socializing</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Build relationships–boss</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Networking</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subordinates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Institutionalized socialization</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. P-O fit</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gendera</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Age</td>
<td>26.62</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Tenure</td>
<td>13.03</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Size</td>
<td>1,458.83</td>
<td>915.72</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $N = 279$. Variables under the titles “Supervisors” and “Subordinates” were measured by supervisors and subordinates, respectively. Reliabilities are in parentheses. For all correlations above .12, $p \leq .05$; for correlations above .16, $p \leq .01$. P-O = person–organization.

*a* Men were coded as 0, and women were coded as 1.
Although the means for proactive behaviors were moderately high (overall $M = 4.70$), bivariate distributions of all proactive behaviors and P-O fit showed good dispersion, permitting meaningful tests of the moderating effects of proactive behaviors on the relationships between socialization tactics and P-O fit. All reliability estimates exceeded .83, with an average reliability of .89. Consistent with Cable and Parsons (2001), institutionalized socialization tactics had a high positive correlation with P-O fit ($r = .49$, $p < .01$).

To examine the relationship between the hypothesized independent variables and P-O fit, we tested three ordinary least squares regression models (see Table 2). Step 1 reports the results for the control variables, Step 2 adds the socialization and proactivity predictors to the equation, and Step 3 adds the hypothesized interaction terms. Thus, Step 3 presents the results of the analysis used to test whether the relationship between socialization tactics and P-O fit was moderated by proactivity.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that institutionalized socialization tactics would be positively related to employees’ P-O fit. As shown in Table 2, institutionalized socialization tactics were positively and significantly related to P-O fit, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that positive framing would enhance the relationship between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit, such that the relationship would become stronger as positive framing increases. Table 2 shows that as positive framing increased, the relationship between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit became stronger, as evidenced by the positive coefficient on the interaction terms ($\beta = .35$, $p < .01$). Also, tests of simple slopes indicated that the positive relationship between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit was not statistically significant when positive framing was low (simple slope = 0.27, ns) but was statistically significant when positive framing was high (simple slope = 1.55, $p < .01$). These slopes are displayed in Figure 1. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that sense making (i.e., information seeking and feedback seeking) would replace the effect of institutionalized tactics on P-O fit, such that the relationship would become weaker as sense making increases. As shown in Table 2, there was no significant interaction effect of sense making on the relationships between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 posited that relationship building (i.e., general socializing, supervisor relationship development, and networking) would diminish the relationship between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit, such that the relationship would become weaker as relationship building increases. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, Table 2 shows that for build relationships–boss, the interaction term was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .01$). Thus, as proactive relationship building with the supervisor increased, the positive link between socialization tactics and P-O fit became weaker. Tests of the simple slopes showed that the relationship between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit was statistically significant when supervisory relationship building was at low levels (simple slope = 1.48, $p < .01$) but was not significant

### Table 2

**Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis for the Effects of Proactivity on the Relationship Between Institutionalized Socialization and P-O Fit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control variable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender*</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.17**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized socialization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback seeking</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information seeking</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive framing</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General socializing</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build relationships–boss</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Socialization X Feedback Seeking</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Socialization X Information Seeking</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Socialization X Positive Framing</td>
<td>-.33**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Socialization X General Socializing</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Socialization X Build Relationships–Boss</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalized Socialization X Networking</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>7.75**</td>
<td>11.81***</td>
<td>5.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.05**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** $N = 279$. The coefficients are standardized beta weights. P-O = person–organization.

*a Men were coded as 0, and women were coded as 1.  
*b Degrees of freedom = 4, 273.  
*c Degrees of freedom = 11, 266.  
*d Degrees of freedom = 17, 260.

$p < .05$.  ** $p < .01$. 


at high levels (simple slope = 0.34, ns). As can be seen in Figure 2, for respondents who proactively built a relationship with their supervisors, institutionalized socialization did not play an important role; but for those who did not attempt to build a strong relationship with their supervisor, institutionalized socialization was a significant predictor of P-O fit. As a supplementary analysis, we also examined whether the length of time managers worked with subordinates affected the interaction of relationship building and institutionalized socialization tactics on P-O fit. Results revealed that re-estimating the equation by adding length of time working together produced almost identical results.

Contrary to Hypothesis 4, general socializing increased the relationship between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). Tests of simple slopes indicated that the relation between institutionalized tactics and P-O fit was significant and positive when general socializing was low and when it was high (simple slope = .55, $p < .01$, and simple slope = 1.28, $p < .01$, respectively), but the effect size was significantly larger when general socializing was high rather than low. These slopes are displayed in Figure 3. Finally, with regard to networking, there was no significant interaction of networking and institutionalized socialization on P-O fit. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported for build relationships–boss but not for general socializing or networking.

Discussion

Socialization is fundamental to organizations because it helps ensure the continuity of central values and it gives new employees a framework for responding to events in their work environment (Bauer et al., 1998; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Despite the importance of understanding how socialization might help establish P-O fit, very few studies have examined this relationship (Bauer et al., 1998).

Given the scarcity of research on socialization tactics and P-O fit, one important result from this study was our replicating the general linkage between institutionalized socialization tactics and employees’ P-O fit found by Cable and Parsons (2001). In general, our results suggest that employees perceive greater values congruence with an organizational culture when they receive a common message and positive social models regarding an organization’s values (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Moreover, our findings suggest that Cable and Parsons’s results generalize to cultures outside of the United States. Specifically, our replication occurred in an international context in which the country’s prevailing social norms and expectations for fitting in were likely quite different from those in the context investigated in Cable & Parsons’s study of U.S. organizations. Thus, our results support and extend Taormina and Bauer’s (2000) study showing that the effects of socialization tactics on job satisfaction and organizational commitment are similar in the United States and Hong Kong. Results from the present study also suggest that, to the extent that they want to inculcate high P-O fit, firms should use highly institutionalized socialization practices. To the extent that firms place lower value on P-O fit and more emphasis on innovation and newcomers discovering their own ways of performing, low institutionalized socialization practices may be more appropriate. Because a cultural norm exists in South Korea to fit in and not “rock the boat,” South Korean firms may be more comfortable with the results from higher versus lower institutionalized socialization practices.
Notwithstanding the general positive linkage between institutionalized socialization tactics and P-O fit, perhaps the most important implication of our findings is that firms do not entirely control the effects of their socialization tactics on new entrants’ P-O fit—employees themselves also play an important role. For example, institutionalized socialization led to P-O fit for employees who framed the entry process positively but was not related to P-O fit for individuals who framed the process negatively. Thus, employees’ positive framing harmonized with institutional tactics to create the greatest effect on P-O fit. On the other hand, some proactive behaviors can replace, rather than harmonize with, institutionalized socialization tactics. For example, as employees’ relationship building with supervisors increased, the positive relationship between socialization tactics and P-O fit became weaker. In general, these findings contribute to a developing research literature that reveals the important role of individuals in the organizational entry process (e.g., Ashford & Black, 1996; Bauer & Green, 1998; Griffin et al., 2000; Morrison, 1993). These results are important to developing and refining socialization theory about how newcomers adapt to their organizational environments, although additional research clearly is needed on this issue. For example, it is possible that Hypothesis 3 was not supported (i.e., new employees’ sense-making activities did not replace organizational socialization tactics) because individuals were able to build from the information offered by the organization through socialization.

These interactive findings also have some practical implications for organizations. For example, organizations that wish to convey their cultures to employees through institutionalized tactics may be more successful if they also hire people who have high positive framing. On the other hand, organizations may find it possible to supplant some types of institutionalized socialization tactics if they can encourage supervisors to create strong relationships with their subordinates (e.g., leader–member exchange).

Although some of the proactive behaviors interacted as expected with socialization tactics, others behaved in unpredicted ways. For example, although we predicted that employees’ relationship-building activities would replace the effects of institutionalized tactics on P-O fit, results revealed that the effect of institutionalized tactics on P-O fit was stronger when general socializing was higher rather than lower. It is possible that for those individuals already prone to want to interact with others in the organization, the institutionalized tactics increased the accessibility of people with whom to socialize. That is, general socializing may help employees build positive social networks that translate into employees feeling they are a part of the new organization (Bauer & Green, 1998), especially in South Korea where the culture emphasizes socializing with others to be a part of the collective (Kim & Markus, 1999). Future research is needed to confirm this effect and to learn more about how and why employees’ relationship building interacts with firms’ socialization tactics and whether the unexpected finding is culture specific or generalizable to other countries. Future studies should also examine how the nature of the relationships that employees build affects the relationships among socialization tactics, employee proactivity, and P-O fit.

Finally, some proactive behaviors did not moderate the effect of socialization tactics on P-O fit. For example, neither information seeking nor feedback seeking interacted with socialization tactics. It is possible that these sense-making processes had null effects because learning more about an organization and its expectations has equivocal implications depending on the values of the employee. For example, gathering information about performance norms may show some employees how well they fit but show other employees how they do not fit, depending on their personal values. Thus, the act of ferreting out organizational information may lead to pleasant outcomes for some and unpleasant outcomes for others, depending on their own values and needs, resulting in a null effect across employees.

It should be noted, first, that in this study we did not examine actual congruence between organizational culture and employees’ values and instead focused on employees’ perceptions of P-O fit. Although perceptions of fitting in are important in their own right (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof, 1996) and although Cable and Parsons (2001) showed that institutional socialization tactics had similar effects on both perceived and actual P-O fit, it is not clear from the present study whether individuals actually developed greater values congruence because of socialization tactics. Likewise, the present study does not offer information about whether proactive behaviors moderate the effects of socialization tactics on actual values congruence.

Second, data in this study were collected at a single point in time, which raises questions about the direction of causality. Predictions were based on the logic that organizational socialization tactics and employees’ proactivity would affect P-O fit, but we cannot rule out the possibility that employees who have high P-O fit perceive organizational socialization tactics as more institutionalized. Longitudinal data collection is necessary for a rigorous test of causal directionality.

Finally, there are several limitations regarding the characteristics of the data used in this study. For example, we did not collect data on the interdependence between employees’ jobs and on how job interdependence might affect coworker relationships through its effect on the salience of coworker relationships. Specifically, in teams in which coworker relationships are salient, relationship building proactivity may play a more important role in moderating the relationship between firms’ socialization tactics and P-O fit than when coworker relationships are not salient. Next, given that the average tenure of our respondents was relatively long (11 months), results may be biased by self-selection if employees who had experienced low P-O fit had already quit. However, the average turnover rate in the organizations was low (i.e., 10.4% in the 2000–2002 period when the study was conducted), and results revealed considerable variance in P-O fit (i.e., $M = 3.7, SD = 1.4$). Thus, self-selection bias due to turnover appears to be minimal in this study. A third potential problem is that respondents may have differed significantly from nonrespondents, and the anonymous nature of our surveys made it impossible to conduct a response–nonresponse analysis. However, given that our response rate was reasonably high (i.e., 56% is consistent with or higher than response rates in other studies of socialization), the data should not have a particularly serious problem in this regard. Finally, 57% of our sample were women, compared with the 2002 South Korean average of 41% working women (National Statistical Office, 2003). The higher percentage of women in our study most likely results from the fact that our sample included two hospitals in which a higher proportion of employees were female. However, the relatively high percentage of women in our sample (compared with that in the working population in South Korea) should not
have affected our results because we controlled for gender when
testing our hypotheses.

The limitations of this study are countered by several important
strengths. First, it is important to balance the people-processing
viewpoint inherent in the existing socialization literature against
the perspective that new employees also have some control over
their entry into an organization. Moreover, supervisors reported
employees’ proactivity behaviors in the present study. Although
the results from these data are probably conservative because
supervisors could not observe all of employees’ proactivity at-
ttempts, the results are considerably more convincing than if all
data came from self-reported data and a one-shot survey. Accord-
ingly, concerns of response biases and self-generated validity are
mitigated in the present study.

Next, it is beneficial to replicate the effects of socialization
tactics across national borders. By finding that some of the basic
logic of socialization holds up despite differences in national
culture, this article supports the generalizability of Van Maanen
and Schein’s (1979) theory that tactics high in institutionaliza-
tion lead to values conformity whereas tactics low in institutionaliza-
tion lead to values diversity.

Finally, the results from this study are based on a large sample
of employee–supervisor pairs in seven different firms across four
industries. This sample diversity increases our confidence that the
results are not simply based on the idiosyncratic socialization
tactics of a single firm or on the specific expectations of entry into
a certain industry. Thus, the characteristics of our sample increase
the generalizability of the results.

Conclusion

Future research may benefit from examining why some proac-
tive behaviors did not affect the linkage between institutionalized
tactics and P-O fit, and it would be interesting to also examine
other individual differences that may affect how socialization
tactics change employees’ P-O fit and subsequent behaviors.
Moreover, it is likely that organizations with stronger cultures are
more likely to use institutionalized socialization tactics, which
suggests that future research should examine culture strength when
investigating the effects of socialization tactics. Finally, it would be
interesting to also examine how socialization tactics and em-
ployee proactivity jointly affect socialization outcomes beyond
P-O fit, such as role orientation and adjustment.

References

Adkins, C. L., Russell, C. J., & Werbel, J. D. (1994). Judgments of fit in
the selection process: The role of work–value congruence. Personnel
Psychology, 47, 605–623.
entry: The role of desire for control. Journal of Applied Psychology, 81,
199–214.
effects on newcomer adjustment. Academy of Management Journal, 39,
149–178.
newcomer adjustment: The role of organizational context. Human Re-
lations, 51, 897–926.

Bauer, T. N., & Green, S. G. (1998). Testing the combined effects of
newcomer information seeking and manager behavior on socialization.
socialization: A review and directions for future research. Research in
Personnel and Human Resources Management, 16, 149–214.
affecting mode of adjustment for new hires. Human Relations, 48,
421–447.
organization, not the job. Academy of Management Executive, 5, 35–51.
Bretz, R. D., Rynes, S. L., & Gerhart, B. (1993). Recruiter perceptions of
applicant fit: Implications for individual career preparation and job
In W. J. Lonner & J. W. Berry (Eds.), Field methods in cross-cultural
Cable, D. M., & DeRue, S. (2002). The construct, convergent, and dis-
riminant validity of subjective fit perceptions. Journal of Applied
Psychology, 87, 875–884.
decisions, and organizational entry. Organizational Behavior and Hu-
organization fit and organizational selection decisions. Journal of Ap-
plied Psychology, 82, 562–577.
Grant, J. M. (2000). Proactive behavior in organizations. Journal of Man-
agement, 26, 435–462.
P. Rosenfeld (Eds.), Research in personnel and human resources man-
Greenberger, D. B., & Strasser, S. (1986). Development and application of
a model of personal control in organizations. Academy of Management
Review, 11, 164–177.
Griffin, A. E. C., Colella, A., & Goparaju, S. (2000). Newcomer and
organizational socialization tactics: An interactionist perspective. Hu-
Jones, G. R. (1986). Socialization tactics, self-efficacy, and newcomers’
adjustments to organizations. Academy of Management Journal, 29,
262–279.
Kim, H., & Markus, H. R. (1999). Deviance or uniqueness, harmony or
conformity? A cultural analysis. Journal of Personality and Social
Psychology, 77, 785–800.
conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. Personnel Psychol-
ogy, 49, 1–49.
nesses. International Studies of Management and Organization, 28,
26–33.
rience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. Administrative Sci-
Luette, S. B., & Svyantek, D. J. (2000). Organizational socialization in the
host country: The missing link in reducing expatriate turnover. Interna-
zational entry: Influences, tactics, and a model of the process. Academy of Management Review, 16, 92–120.


Received May 21, 2003
Revision received January 27, 2004
Accepted February 2, 2004

---

**ORDER FORM**

Start my 2005 subscription to the *Journal of Applied Psychology*! ISSN: 0021-9010

$86.00, APA MEMBER/AFFILIATE

$180.00, INDIVIDUAL NONMEMBER

$504.00, INSTITUTION

(In DC add 5.75% / In MD add 5% sales tax)

**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED** $

Subscription orders must be prepaid. (Subscriptions are on a calendar year basis only.) Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of the first issue. Call for international subscription rates.

**SENDER THIS ORDER FORM TO:**
American Psychological Association Subscriptions 750 First Street, NE Washington, DC 20002-4242

Or call (800) 374-2721, fax (202) 336-5568. TDD/TTY (202) 336-6123.

For subscription information, e-mail: subscriptions@apa.org

---

1. **Send me a FREE Sample Issue**
2. **Check enclosed** (make payable to APA)
3. **Charge my:** VISA  MasterCard  American Express

Cardholder Name ____________________________ Exp. Date ________

Card No. ____________________________

Signature (Required for Charge)

**BILLING ADDRESS:**

Street ____________________________

City ____________________________ State ______ Zip ______

Daytime Phone ____________________________

E-mail ____________________________

**SHIP TO:**

Name ____________________________

Address ____________________________

City ____________________________ State ______ Zip ______

APA Member # ____________________________ APLA15