Newcomer Socialization: The Roles of the Employee and the Organization

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Abstract

Newcomer Socialization: The Roles of the Employee and the Organization presents individuals with a unique case study that allows individuals to observe socialization first hand, increase their familiarity and comprehension of organizational socialization, and effectively generate group discussion in an organizational work setting, as well as, in a college classroom. Furthermore, this case study helps to create an environment where the facilitator has an opportunity to unite multiple socialization concepts with a single exercise. Finally, the reader will not only come to understand the pedagogical benefits of the case study approach, but they will also be equipped with the necessary tools to implement the aforementioned concepts in his or her respective fields.
Newcomer Socialization: The Roles of the Employee and the Organization

Every new employee experiences an adjustment process when entering a new organization. This is a process that typically occurs over a long period of time, as the new employee begins to get acclimated to the organization’s culture, politics, values/goals, language, and other established employees. Some organizations, in the past, have conducted formal orientation programs for their new employees, while others use more informal programs and allow their new employees to figure out the organization for themselves. A great deal of previous research has been done about the effects of the adjustment process, often termed the socialization process, of new employees. Much emphasis has been placed on how the organization chooses to socialize their employees and what types of employees tend to react the best to which types of socialization tactics.

This paper hopes to provide a thorough overview of the socialization process, first by providing a rationale for the use of the case study method as an effective pedagogical tool for teaching this concept of organizational communication. A review of literature provides a well-rounded view of past research in the organizational communication field that focuses on the socialization process of organizational newcomers. A case study of the typical socialization process of an organizational newcomer is provided to give a ‘real-life’ example of a new employee. Finally, suggestions are included to provide instructors and trainers with possible ways to include this case study in socialization units or training programs.

Rationale for the Case Study Method

The case study method is proven to be an effective pedagogical tool for teaching a variety of organizational communication concepts in the classroom. The case study method is defined as ‘a concept whose critical attributes are that it is a form of simulation with a clearly defined
objective – analyze and solve job related problems – and that it contains complete, accurate and clear descriptions of the issues, events and characters” (Stolovirch & Keeps, 1991, p. 43). The case study method allows students or organizational members to transfer the information they are learning in the classroom to a ‘real-life’ setting. This method not only provides individuals with opportunities to engage in higher order thinking, but it also serves as the marriage between praxis and theory (Stolovirch & Keeps, 1991). However, case studies will not be the most effective means of teaching all areas of content. “The case study method is superior for objectives requiring evaluation, synthesis, inference drawing and in perceiving relationships” (Knirk, 1991, p. 74). The case study method provides individuals with the opportunity to take the information they are learning and apply it to outside situations. Participants are not only provided with a chance to apply class or boardroom concepts, but they are usually given the opportunity to synthesize a number of concepts into a single activity.

Research suggests that business administration, law, and medicine are the three fields that use the case study method most extensively (Knirk, 1991). Recent scholars have begun to explore the usefulness of the case study method in organizational communication. Mier (1982) suggests that

Key concepts in organizational communication are often difficult to separate from other managerial concepts because they tend to overlap with such organizational issues as leadership, control, organizational development, interpersonal relations, and motivation. However, the clarifying perspective necessary for introducing undergraduate students to this exciting area of communication can often be found in a mode of learning which affords great elasticity – the case method. (p. 151)
If the case study method is conducted effectively, students should be able to question the underlying organizational goals and values that could affect the attitudes, assumptions, and policies of an organization (Mier, 1982). The more students are able to question why particular things occur in an organization before they actually reach the organization, the better off they will be once they enter the workforce upon graduation.

Based on the Mier’s (1982) rationale for the case study method, the remainder of this paper will focus on a case study about the socialization process of an organizational newcomer. This method affords both instructors and students the opportunity to dissect the socialization process and to discuss the effects different socialization tactics have on the organizational newcomer.

Literature Review

Past research about organizational socialization has been very consistent in its definition. Organizational socialization is defined as the “process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). Bullis (1993) furthers this definition by proposing that socialization is the “process through which newcomers become organizational members” (p. 10). Although many researchers may have different wordings for their definitions of organizational socialization, they are all essentially the same. Organizational socialization is the process in which new employees become official members of the organization by learning about the organization’s norms, values, beliefs, as well as the requirements to effectively perform their job.

Socialization is not a process that can simply occur overnight. Both the organizational newcomers and the organization itself have to put in a great deal of effort in order for the process to be effective. In many cases, it takes a great deal of time for an individual to become
completely socialized into an organization because there is usually a lot of information to learn about various dimensions of the organization.

**Stages of Socialization**

There are three main stages of the socialization process: prearrival, encounter, and metamorphosis. The prearrival stage includes all of the learning that occurs before the individual actually enters the organization. It is understood that when an individual enters an organization, he or she has his or her own values, attitudes, and expectations for his or her job and the organization. Prearrival socialization will most likely occur in outside training or in school while individuals are learning the attitudes and values that different types of organizations are looking for. In order for an individual to be successful this level of socialization, he or she has to correctly anticipate the expectations and desires of those involved in the organization (Robbins, 1989).

During the encounter stage, the employee gets a chance to experience the organization and determine whether or not his or her expectations and the reality of the organization are the same thing. If the new employee determines that his or her expectations and the reality of the organization are the same, this phase serves as a time to reaffirm his or her early expectations. On the other hand, if the new employee’s expectations and the reality of the organization do not match, he or she must begin another socialization process in order to eliminate previous expectations and replace them with the actual occurrences of the organization (Robbins, 1989).

Finally, in the metamorphosis stage, the new employee has a chance to master his or her task, successfully integrate him or herself into the organization, and make any necessary changes to his or her values to reflect those of the organization. Most researchers make the argument that this stage is complete when a new employee has become comfortable with both his or her job
and the organization. At this point, the organizational newcomer knows what is expected of him or her and what is considered acceptable work in the organization (Robbins, 1989).

Although the length of each stage of socialization may differ for each person, the socialization process for each organizational newcomer is essentially the same. The organizational newcomer begins to gain information before he or she actually enters the organization, they then gain more information after entering the organization, and finally become comfortable with his or her role within the organization. Throughout each stage of socialization, the new employee learns information about the dimensions of socialization.

**Dimensions of Socialization**

After reviewing a variety of past literature in the organizational socialization field, Schein (1968) identified six major dimensions of socialization: program proficiency, people, politics, language, organizational goals/values, and history. Program proficiency involves determining whether or not an employee has mastered the skills necessary for his or her job. The people dimension of socialization involves determining whether or not the employee has established meaningful relationships with his or her coworkers. The politics dimension is concerned with whether or not the employee has gathered enough information about the formal and informal relationships and power structures within the organization. The language dimension involves determining whether or not the employee is familiar with not only the technical language necessary for his or her job, but also the slang and jargon unique to the organization. The organizational goals/values dimension involves determining whether or not the employee has gathered enough information about the principles that help maintain the integrity of the organization. Knowledge about the history of the organization will help the newcomer determine which behaviors are appropriate and which are inappropriate and will also provide him or her
with unique information about the organization’s culture (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).

Throughout an organizational socialization program, an organizational newcomer should increase their knowledge of each of the aforementioned socialization dimensions. However, it is important to note that if an employee switches jobs, even if it is within the same organization, they will most likely have to be resocialized in each of the six content dimensions. When employees who stayed in a position were compared to those who changed jobs, they were found to have increased in their socialization of program proficiency, language, people, and history (Chao et al., 1994).

It is important to recognize that one socialization training program will not work for all types of organizations. Human Resource Departments and managers need to be aware of the organizational culture when planning training programs, because if the culture is not taken into consideration the needs of the newcomers may not be met leading to decreased job satisfaction and a higher intention to quit shortly after arriving. Research (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1998) suggests that training programs will only be effective if they represent the culture of the overall organization. For instance, if the organization is large and very formal, a structured training program should easily meet the needs of their newcomers. However, if the organization is more laid back and small, a more individualized training program will probably be more effective.

A variety of socialization tactics have been used by organizations to adequately acclimate their newcomers to their jobs. Based on past research, six dialectics of socialization tactics have been recognized. Each of these tactics as its place in an organization, some are more effective then others.
Types of Socialization Processes

Collective vs. individual socialization.

Collective socialization “involves putting a group of recruits through a common set of experiences together” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 151). Large corporations often use this type of socialization when they want to send new employees through training in cohorts in order to build “a collective sense of reality” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 151). However, previous research has found that collective socialization tactics are not related to a newcomer’s subjective perceptions of person-organization fit or the congruence of individual and organizational values (Cable and Parsons, 2001). This may suggest that the context of socialization does not have an effect on the outcomes of socialization training.

Individual socialization “occurs when recruits are brought into the organization in relative isolation from one another and put through a unique set of learning experiences” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, pp. 151-152). Companies will tend to use these types of socialization tactics when they use more on on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs.

Formal vs. informal socialization.

Formal socialization “occurs when newcomers are segregated, in one form or another, from regular organizational members” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 152). This segregation can range from actually removing the organizational newcomers from the established employees to having them wear different uniforms in order to show their status as new employees. Organizations tend to use these tactics when it is imperative that employees learn the ‘correct’ values and beliefs of the organization.

Informal socialization “does not segregate the newcomer in any special way or distinguish the newcomer’s role specifically but instead use informal, laissez-faire socialization
for recruits” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 152). This type of socialization allows newcomers to effectively meld with their coworkers and allows them to make ‘real’ mistakes.

**Sequential vs. random socialization.**

Sequential socialization occurs when an “organization specifies a certain set of steps to be completed in order to advance to the target role” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 152). Several professional training programs, such as doctors and funeral directors, require a particular sequence of steps to be completed before an organizational newcomer can actually assume the role. Past research has suggested that newcomers’ values were likely to shift to those of the organization after engaging sequential socialization. Not only will sequential socialization training affect the shifting of a newcomer’s values, but it is also positively related to a newcomer’s subjective perceptions of person-organization fit (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Random socialization “occurs when the sequence of steps leading to the target role is unknown, ambiguous, or continually changing” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p.241). In this case, the newcomer is left to make sense of the socialization process on his or her own. Often times, the newcomer is exposed to many organizational viewpoints and then is left to clarify the necessary steps to achieve his or her position.

**Fixed vs. variable socialization.**

Fixed socialization is when the organization “provides the newcomer with a precise timetable for when to expect progression to the target role” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 152). Similar to sequential socialization, it is made very clear to the newcomer how he or she will progress to their target role.

Variable socialization occurs when the organization “provides no real cues to the newcomer as to when to expect movement to the target role” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 152).
Most organizations use this type of socialization due to the ever-changing global environment and internal organizational structures.

*Serial vs. disjunctive socialization.*

Serial socialization occurs when an organization uses experienced employees to serve as mentors to the newcomers. The mentors help show the new employees the inner workings, such as internal politics and the goals/values, of the organization (Modaff & DeWine, 2002). This type of socialization program works particularly well in academic settings with new faculty and administrators. Serial socialization provides new employees with the social aspects of adjustment that the other types of socialization do not necessarily provide. It has been suggested that the social aspects of serial and investiture socialization are related to both newcomers’ perceptions of fitting in as well as any changes in their personal values (Cable & Parsons, 2001). Many have considered the social aspect of organizational socialization to be one of the most important, because if a newcomer does not feel like he or she ‘fits in’ in an organization, he or she is not likely to work his or her hardest or to be particularly loyal to the organization.

Disjunctive socialization occurs when the organizational newcomer is not provided with a mentor and he or she is left to discover the inner workings of the organization on his or her own (Modaff & DeWine, 2002). This type of socialization works best in organizations that have recently undergone some major restructuring and are using the newcomers to fill open positions.

*Investiture vs. divestiture socialization.*

Investiture socialization occurs when the organization recognizes the individual qualities that the newcomer brings to his or her position. During this type of socialization, the organization does not attempt to change anything about the new employee, but rather makes the newcomer’s qualities work for the organization (Modaff & DeWine, 2002).
Divestiture socialization “seeks to deny and strip away certain personal characteristics of a newcomer” (Modaff & DeWine, 2002, p. 153). This type of socialization works most effectively in organizations that are seeking to increase predictability and standardization. The military tends to use divestiture socialization in boot camps (Modaff & DeWine, 2002).

Although different socialization tactics may work better for certain organizations, it is important to consider the type of person the new employee is. The organizational newcomer’s personality will have a large effect on how he or she reacts to socialization training.

Socialization and the Employee

Past research (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003) has defined individuals with proactive personalities as those who behave confidently, actively work to control their environments, and seek out information. They found that individuals with proactive personalities are positively related to the socialization dimensions of task mastery, role clarity, work group integration, and political knowledge. It was also suggested that it would be helpful for managers to determine if their potential hires have proactive personalities, because they will be the employees that need less help in the socialization process (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). However, managers should not hire someone based on the fact that they do not have a proactive personality, but they should be aware that they may need more time in the adjustment process.

Research (Tharenou, 2001) has found that the more training motivation, both as motivation through expectation and motivation to learn, a new employee has along with the support they receive from supervisors; the more likely they will be to participate in training and development programs. It is important that management in organizations realize the important role they play in motivating their new employees to participate in training programs. If
socialization programs are effectively matched with the type of organization and the new employees, both groups will reap a variety of benefits.

*Effects of Effective Socialization Processes*

It was revealed the importance of socialization training programs because of the information they provide new employees with about the goals/values and history of the organization (Klein and Weaver, 2000). This information is crucial for new employees as they begin to find their niche within the organization. It is also imperative to make sure that new employees clearly understand the goals and values of the organization and are able to implement them in their individual jobs.

Other research found that the amount and helpfulness of training are positively related to the ability to cope, job attitudes, and job performance, and at the same time negatively related to intentions to quit (Saks, 1996). Entry and socialization training should also be used to reduce the anxiety of organizational newcomers in order for them to be productive members of the organization. The same study also found that anxiety is related to work outcomes, and that the relationship between entry training and work outcomes is due to a reduction in a newcomer’s anxiety. It is also important to note that newcomers who come away from training with positive attitudes and lower intentions of quitting will be much more effective employees and will probably make more significant contributions to the organization in the long-run.

Socialization has also been found to be positively related to both job satisfaction and employee commitment (Taormina & Bauer, 2000). This may have something to do with the employee-centered workplace that has developed in the United States as of late. Managers should continue to focus their attention on their employees because the more satisfied they are, the more likely they are to be productive. They should also be aware of the socialization
processes of their new employees, so that in the long run their employees will not only be satisfied with their jobs, but also committed to the organization.

Other research has suggested that socialization on the dimensions of goals/values, history and language would lead to increased feelings of attachment and identification with the organization. It has been determined that attending an orientation program resulted in increased affective organizational commitment through the increased learning of socialization content (Klein and Weaver, 2000). By requiring employees to participate in training programs, the organization is actually doing themselves a favor because the new employees should complete their training feeling more committed to the organization and, hopefully, more satisfied with the work they will be doing.

Socialization is a concept that all organizational members should be aware before they enter an organization, as well as, throughout the duration of their organizational experience. The organization and the employee both play very important roles in this process – the organization chooses the socialization tactics that would best match their organizational culture and the individual has to be willing and open-minded to learn about his or her organization.

In order to best understand the socialization process, it is beneficial to look at a case study of an organizational newcomer getting acclimated to her new job. The following case study attempts to provide a creative illustration of what a new employee may experience upon starting a new job. Succeeding the case study is an outline (see Appendix A) that selects and organizes key parts and fact of the case study in an orderly, logical sequence. The goal of this outline is for it to be able to stand alone and provide the reader with a clear idea of what the case is about. Additionally, supplementary material for the case study, such as the case study’s
learning objectives, keywords, discussion questions, a debriefing focus, and a teaching activity, are provided for the instructors’ and trainers’ utilization (see Appendix B).
“Different on the Inside”

I can remember receiving that phone call like it was just yesterday, I felt like I was the king of all kings, telling the Vice President of Finer Foods Inc. that I would accept the position. I was ecstatic about finally entering the real world, let alone with such a prominent company. I even remember how jealous all of my friends were, who either couldn’t find a job or still didn’t even have enough credits to graduate from college. Little did they know, or even did I know, what was waiting for me on the inside.

At 22 years old, I was Liz Ruggles, District Manager. On one hand, I was excited just to begin building on my communication degree, but at the same time, I knew how marketable I would be to even bigger and better companies after having Finer Foods on my resume. However, I wasn’t sure what exactly my future was going to hold for me, maybe I would even end up retiring from Finer Foods someday. All I knew going into my first job was that this company really seemed like a great place to work.

In my first interview, I met with District Manager John Alverez. He was probably in his mid-20s, and had already being running his five store district for three years. John was personable, upbeat, intelligent, and very knowledgeable about Finer Foods. The best part was that if I got the position, John and I would not only be colleagues, but he would be my peer mentor as well. At the second interview, I was introduced to David Jansen, who was the Director of Operations and the immediate supervisor to half of Finer Foods 14 District Managers. I asked to spend the entire day with David, as we toured the warehouse, the corporate building, and several of the local Finer Foods stores. I was very impressed with the thoroughness and attention that David put forth during our day together, to answer any and all of my questions, along with inflating me with tons of company background, rules, regulations and polices. One day after
David and I had met, I received a phone call telling me that I made it to the third and final interview day, and that I was to meet Vice President, Waden Winder, that next Friday for the final interview. Before I knew it Friday was already here. After spending the entire day with Waden, riding around from store to store, eating a fancy lunch, laughing and having a good time, he concluded our day together by telling me that within the next seven days I will either receive a phone call offering me the position, or a company letter thanking me for my time but letting me know that the position was offered to a more qualified candidate. Two days later, Waden called to tell me that he, John, and David all ranked me as their top candidate and would love me to come aboard their team. I was delighted and couldn’t wait for my first day of work.

**Day One**

I remember having a lot of positive nervous energy, early that Monday morning, as my mother dropped me off at the Finer Foods corporate office. You see, I had to get a ride into work that morning because my company car was waiting in the parking lot for me to drive home that evening after we concluded the day. I was really looking forward to meeting people and getting an understanding of what the “corporate world” was all about. Looking back on it, maybe I shouldn’t have been that excited.

I was one of five district manager new hires for the year and we were all going to embark on our one year training program at the same time. As I walked through the main office, I was greeted my almost every administrative assistant there. Most of them either said “Hello, welcome to the company, we are glad that you are here,” or “Hello, I don’t believe that we have met before.” I felt very comfortable and embraced, as I walked down that long hallway in search of what my training manual referred to as the “executive conference room.” In part, I think that I was beginning to relax because I knew I was not in this process alone, and that I had four other
district manager trainees to lean on for support. As the five of us sat, waiting in the conference room, I began to recall all of the comments that were expressed to me during the interview process about how being in the world of retail is a unique experience and that it requires dedication and long hours. In mid thought, in walks Waden Winder, who say, “Good morning, I want to welcome you to your orientation, please find the appropriate brown box with your name written on it.” I walked over to locate mine, only to find inside six, inch and a half binders, labeled as “training and procedure” manuals, stuffed inside my box. This should have been my first indication of the amount of information I was about to receive. Waden proceeded to say, “On page one, of your DM training manual-1, you will find your tentative training schedule timeline, please take a minute to review this information.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Phase</th>
<th>Date to Start</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Trainer(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>6/2/03</td>
<td>1 Day</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Vice-President &amp; Director of Store Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>DM Introduction</td>
<td>6/3/03</td>
<td>2 Weeks</td>
<td>Peer Advisor’s District</td>
<td>Peer Advisor: John Alvarez</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-Store Training</td>
<td>6/16/03</td>
<td>12 Weeks</td>
<td>Store #62</td>
<td>Aaron Carte</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrap Up</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>Various</td>
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<td>DM Warehouse Training</td>
<td>9/8/03</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
<td>Warehouse</td>
<td>Warehouse Supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting Store Manager</td>
<td>9/15/03</td>
<td>15 Weeks</td>
<td>Store #57</td>
<td>Nick Aries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM Training Phase I</td>
<td>12/29/03</td>
<td>6 Weeks</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Sarah Bishop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM Administration Training</td>
<td>2/9/04</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Director of Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>DM Training Phase II</td>
<td>2/16/04</td>
<td>5 Weeks</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>JP Sweda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations and Vice President Review</td>
<td>3/22/03</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Vice-President and Director of Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting DM</td>
<td>3/29/04</td>
<td>6 Weeks</td>
<td>Peer Advisor’s District</td>
<td>John Alvarez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Evaluation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director Training</td>
<td>5/10/04</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Directors and Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Assignment</td>
<td>5/17/04</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
After a quick three minutes, Waden then said “You will also find on page two of that same binder, the tentative times and dates for various seminars that you will be required to attend throughout your training. Please take another minute to review this information.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
<th>Suggested Week(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Divisional FMS</td>
<td>6/12/03</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>1st – 2nd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Store Tour and Grocery Merchandising</td>
<td>7/17/03</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>3rd – 12th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inventory</td>
<td>8/21/03</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>14th – 29th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>9/4/04</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>14th – 29th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner Organization</td>
<td>1/29/04</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>30th – 35th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>3/4/04</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Director of Operations</td>
<td>37th – 42nd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dale Carnegie</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Dale Carnegie</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Corporate AMS</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Vice Presidents</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<td>Reid Integrity Interview</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Divisional Office</td>
<td>Reid &amp; Associates</td>
<td>Annually</td>
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</table>

As the day went on, Waden continued to introduce more and more information about the history of the company, the company objectives, company policies and so forth. We watched videos, discussed the company handbook, participated in activities and most of all listened to lectures from Waden himself. Outside of the hour break for lunch at the Olive Garden, we were trapped in that conference room from 8:00 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. During my two hour ride home, in my brand new company car, I had plenty of time to reflect on everything that I was introduced to and began to question why they, Finer Foods, would overload us like that, with so much information at one time. I didn’t think much of it at the time, figuring that I was just feeling stressed because it was my first day on the job. However, I knew that I need to get home as fast as I could because I had to get started reading through the six manuals that we were given, and expected to know in only a few short weeks.
Week One

My first day forecasted my first week, the information just did not stop coming. However, I was beginning to feel more a part of the Finer Foods organizations each day. I could now walk thorough the office and co-workers would address me by name and even comment or question me about how training was going so far. My first week was especially satisfying because I was able to spend the entire week with the other four new trainees. We were able to reminisce about stories from college, compare and contrast our interview processes, and even talk about what we hope to attain from working at Finer Foods. At the same time, I was able to begin developing a professional, working relationship with my peer advisor, John. Although I was a little confused if my relationship with John was supposed to be that of a co-worker and thus a friendship or more of a supervisor/boss type of relationship. However, trivial at the time, I did not think much more of it.

I can vividly remember my first district manager meeting, on that Thursday of my first week. All fourteen district managers, both directors of operations, the vice president, and us five trainees sat around an enormous, shiny, hardwood conference table at the Hilton, downtown Chicago. This was the first time that I would officially introduce myself to the other district managers. Each trainee got about five minutes or so, to disclose information about where we received our education from, where we lived, any information about their families and finally, why we chose Finer Foods. This part of the meeting did not go as bad as I thought it would. It was the other eleven hours that exhausted me. The problem was that this was the regular monthly district manager meeting. At each of these meeting, the vice president and David, director of operations, reviewed content from last month of Finer Food business and introduced content for
the following month(s) of Finer Food business. At one point in the meeting, Waden said “Please pass along to your managers that bread orders need to be received by Barb and Kathy by every Thursday of Period IV, transmitted by the MDT, under sector 31.” After hearing this, I began questioning the idea of us trainees being thrown into or assimilated into this meeting with already trained and experienced district managers. I thought to myself, “What is sector 31, let alone and MDT?” I began to wonder if this whole group training process that I have previously enjoyed and heard so many positive things about, was really going to be beneficial or not. At the conclusion of the meeting, I remember walking out feeling overwhelmed and confused by the events that had taken place that day, even questioning some of the procedural methods of the Finer Foods training program.

**Month One**

Throughout the first few weeks at Finer Foods, most of my colleagues told me positive things about the position of the district manager; however, as time went on, and the relationship became more comfortable, I began wonder if what I was originally told about the warm positive climate would hold true over the test of time. I overheard many co-workers gossip about how other divisions didn’t have it has difficult or cut-throat as we did because our division was the headquarters for all of Finer Foods across the United States. Nonetheless, I maintained an open mind and continued about my training.

By time I was at the “in-store” phase of my training and I began to feel even more confused. At this stage, I was required to spend several weeks at store #62 with the store manager Aaron Carte. It was the responsibility of Aaron to teach me the ins and outs of running a Finer Foods store at the store level, as opposed to the district level. I thought this was an excellent strategy, that is, to teach me the basics from the beginning of running an individual
store, from my subordinate’s level, before holding me accountable for overseeing multiple stores. However, over these several weeks, I became very confused as to who my supervisor really was, and what role I was supposed to be “playing” for the company.

As a district manager, my direct supervisor is supposed to be the director of operations, who is David. I was then assigned a peer advisor, John, another district manager, whose responsibility is to help guide me through the training process, as well as, provide me with a shoulder to lean on or a resource for any questions I may have along the way. However, the confusion set in when I entered the in-store training portion. I was now working for Aaron, at Aaron’s store, store #62. Store #62 was also one of the five stores that were in John’s district. So, to lay it all out, I was a district manager, working underneath a store manager, Aaron, whose store was overseen by another district manager, John, who was overseen by my “original” boss David, the director of operations. I remember thinking to myself, “Ugh, who am I supposed to report to and who am I really working for?” “Is David still my boss, but he can’t be because I am working for John right now… no wait I am really working for Aaron at the time!” I felt lost, I had no idea what role I was supposed to be functioning in, let alone who I was supposed to be taking orders from. Was I a district manager, or a store manager?

Just like I did for the first several weeks, I continued to tell myself that this was normal and that I could work through the confusion and unhappiness. Maybe I remained positive about my experiences because of the wonderful paycheck that I just received at the end of my first grueling month. I remember thinking to myself, “Wow, the government can take two thousand dollars out of everyone one of my paychecks and I am still left with three thousand dollars every month of my own.” Or, maybe it was the fact that for the first time ever, since I had turned sixteen, I did not have to pay for my own gasoline; no matter if I was traveling for work or
pleasure, Finer Foods picked up the tab. Despite my disgust for my new job at this point, I was loving the monetary benefits associated with it.

Month Eleven

In several ways, my first day, first week, and first month forecasted what has almost been a complete year at Finer Foods. In fact, they rather accurately predicted the company’s climate, culture, and even my role ambiguity as a district manager trainee. However, I was beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. You see, I only had one more month of training left and then I would have my own district and be on my own schedule. Granted the company’s polices and my job description would not change, but I would finally be “set free,” and given my own district, where I could make my own decision and set my own schedule. I can recall John saying, “If you can make it through Finer Foods training program, then you can make it through anything.” He also said, “Once you complete your training you have to assume more responsibility, but you work on your own schedule, so your work life becomes more flexible and therefore, enjoyable.” With these thoughts in mind, I was excited to see just how different the “other side” was going to be.

It was during my eleventh month that something unexpected happened. I received a letter in mail from a very prestigious university, offering me a two-year full tuition paid opportunity to attend graduate school. In addition, I was being asked to teach two entry-level, university required classes, during each of the four semesters that I would be attending. The catch was that I only had about a month to inform the university of my acceptance or denial of their offer. My initial reaction was that I could continue to work at Finer Foods and work toward my Masters degree at the same time. No sooner did I think that, then did I recalled the handbook
acknowledging that only a bachelors degree was required for any position district manager and higher, and, therefore, having a master degree would result in no further wage increase.

As I continued to go to work for the next few weeks I found myself weighing both the positive and negative aspects of my two options. One thing that I had to keep in mind was that this was only a one time offer from both organizations, meaning that if I left Finer Foods, there would be no returning, and if I declined the assistantship offer to graduate school, I would no longer be eligible for another assistantship from them. Should I continue working at Finer Foods, in hope that after completing the training program my job satisfaction would increase? Or, should I resign my position and enter graduate school, in pursuit of a different career path? I didn’t know what to do, or what to feel. All I knew is that time was running out and a decision had to be made.

**Summary**

By engaging in the proceeding literature and analyzing a case study of an organizational adjustment process of a new employee, one should have a thorough understanding of the socialization process, as well as the different approaches to socialization that an employer can utilize. The case study method is an effective pedagogical tool for teaching organizational communication concepts because it provides students with the opportunity to expand their knowledge beyond the classroom doors to the ‘real world’. Past research has focused on how the organization chooses to socialize their employees and what types of employees tend to react the best to various types of socialization tactics. The story of Liz Ruggles provides unique insight into the orientation process of an organization. The supplemental teaching activity also acts as tool of further exploration of the socialization process. The socialization process is one that all future employees and employers should be aware of, especially since it often begins while
students are still in college, learning concepts that they hope to effectively apply to their future careers.
References


APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY OUTLINE
I. **Introduction**

A. The case opens with Liz recalling a phone call from the vice president of Finer Foods
B. Liz Ruggles just graduated from college and is accepting a job offer with a very prestigious company called Finer Foods
C. At 22, she is very excited about the idea of getting into the “real world”
D. Liz recall her experiences during the interview process and remembers just how grueling of a process it really was

II. **Day One: Liz’s first day on the job**

A. Liz recalls all of her positive nervous energy on her ride to the corporate office
B. Day one orientation is a group session, where all five of the district manager new hires are present, initially Liz believes that a group orientation is helpful
C. Vice President, Waden Winder, welcomes the group and distributes an abundance of training and procedural manuals
D. Right off the bat, Liz begins to feel overwhelmed with the ample amount of information that the trainees are presented with
E. The entire year long training program is laid out before each new hire, and reality is beginning to settle in
F. Day one ends with Liz experiencing information overload and exhausted, but hopeful and excited to see what the next several days will bring her

III. **Week One: Liz’s first week on the job**

A. The first day on the job mirrored the first week on the job
B. Liz recalls attending her first monthly district manager meeting
C. During this meeting Liz begins to question why the five new hires are attending the monthly company meeting with all of the seasoned employees.
D. Confusion begins to set in, as all of the information discussed in the meeting is of a foreign language to the new hires.
E. This segment ends with Liz questioning the idea of a group socialization process versus an individual socialization process

IV. **Month One: Liz’s first month on the job**

A. Month one begins with Liz discovering that all of the positive things she originally heard when first joining the company, may be a little different now that she is on the inside
B. Liz is entering the “in-store” portion of her training program, where she begins to experience role confusion.
C. During this phase of training, Liz experiences difficulty understanding her role with the company, as well as, who her direct supervisor is, and who she is to be taking instructions from
D. Liz continues to convince herself that her feeling are normal and finds that she is liking her new job more and more simply because of the financial benefits
V. **Month Eleven: One month left of training**
   A. In several ways, the first day, first week, and first month all previewed how Liz’s first year was going to be
   B. Liz begins to see the light at the end of the tunnel, as she approaches her final month of training
   C. She is hopeful that after receiving her own district, and making her own schedule, that she will enjoy working at Finer Foods much more
   D. Liz recalls some of her coworkers telling her that if she could make it through training that her job satisfaction would increase drastically, once on the “other side”
   E. Unexpectedly, Liz receives a one-time assistantship offer from a very prestigious university to attend graduate school in the upcoming semester
   F. With only a month to make up her mind, Liz is faced with the difficult decision, either to remain with Finer Foods in hope of liking her job better in the future, or resigning her position and entering graduate school

VI. **Conclusion**
   A. The case ends with time running out and a decision needing to be made
   B. The reader is reminded that once resigning from the Finer Foods position, an employee is not allowed to come back, and by denying the offer from the university you void your chance at receiving an assistantship in the future
APPENDIX B

SUPPORTING MATERIAL
Case Overview

At the age of 22, Liz Ruggles has just accepted a prestigious, high-paying job, with Finer Food Inc. On her drive to the corporate office on her first day of work, Liz recalls her experiences during the grueling process and is determined to turn her nervousness into positive energy. Day one of Liz’s experience takes place in a group session, with four other newly hired district manager trainees being welcomed by the Vice President of Finer Foods, Waden Winder. Encouraged by the idea of a group training process, Liz leaves the office after day one feeling overwhelmed, but excited to see what the next several days have in store for her. By the time her first week passes, Liz has attended the monthly district manager meeting, where she begins to question the motives behind what was once viewed as a positive group training process. Overloaded and unfamiliar with the topics discussed in the district manager meeting, Liz continues to convince herself that her uneasy feelings are normal, and that her job satisfaction is sure to increase over time. A month into the training process, Liz is placed in a difficult context where she becomes confused about her role with the company, as well as who exactly is her direct supervisor. Buckling down, Liz journeys on to the point where she can finally see the end of her training program coming clear. With only one month of training left, Liz is offered a graduate assistantship to a prestigious university. Liz finds herself having to decide whether life will get better for her once she completes the district manager training, or would she be better suited resigning her position and attending graduate school.

Learning Objectives

To better understand the different types of organizational socialization.

To better understand how organizations approach the process of socialization.
Key Characters

**Liz Ruggles:** A recent college graduate who has just accepted a district manager position at Finer Foods. Over the course of eleven months, she finds herself questioning her job satisfaction, as well as the socialization process she has gone through.

**John Alverez:** An experienced district manager, who is assigned to be Liz’s peer advisor and eventually the district manager over the store in which Liz is asked to run.

**Waden Winder:** The vice president of Finer Foods, who is responsible for the first day orientation for all of the newly hired district managers.

**David Jansen:** The director of operation, which means he is the direct supervisor over Liz and all of the district managers.

Key Concepts

**Socialization** – the process that adapts new employees to the organization’s culture (Robbins, 1989)

**Prearrival stage** – the period of learning in the socialization process that occurs before the employee joins the organization (Robbins, 1989)

**Encounter stage** – the stage of the socialization process in which the new employee see what the organization is really like and confronts the likelihood that expectations and reality may diverge (Robbins, 1989)

**Metamorphosis stage** – the stage in the socialization process in which the new employee adjusts to his or her work groups values and goals (Robbins, 1989)

**Collective socialization** – putting a group of recruits through a common set of training experiences together (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)
Individual socialization – when new employees are brought to the organization in isolation and put through unique sets of training experiences (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Formal socialization – when newcomers are segregated from the established employees during their training (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Informal socialization – newcomers are not segregated from established employees, but rather is a laissez-faire means of socializing the new employees (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Sequential socialization – when an organization specifies a certain set of steps to be completed in order to advance to a particular role (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Random socialization – when an organization does not specify a certain set of steps to advance to a particular role (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Fixed socialization – a particular timetable is laid out for the socialization process by the organization (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Variable socialization – when the organization does not provide many cues as what to expect during the socialization process (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Serial socialization – when the organization used established employees to serves as mentors for the new employees (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Disjunctive socialization – when new employees are not provided with a mentor and are left to figure out the new organization on their own (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Investiture socialization – when the organization recognizes the individual qualities that each newcomer brings to the organization and does not attempt to change them (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)

Divestiture socialization – when the organization seeks to strip all the personal qualities of the newcomer to get them to match the organization (Modaff & Dewine, 2002)
Role conflict – discrepancies between expected, perceived, and enacted roles (Daniels & Spiker, 1991)

Work overload – refers to either too much work or work that is too difficult (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001)

Organization – a consciously coordinated social unit, composed of two or more people, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals (Robbins, 1989)

Culture – a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to problems (Schein, 1985)

Functional Theory - By comparing various systems in terms of effectiveness to produce high-quality decisions, four key communication functions should exist: (1) An understanding the Problem (2) Marshaling a range of alternatives (3) Assessing positive consequences of each alternative (4) Assessing negative consequences of each alternative. Thus, competent performance of the four functions is more important, in terms of getting a good decision, than the sequencing of the functions (Miller, 2002).

Discussion Questions

1. How does the nature of a company’s interviewing process play a role in the socialization of a newly hired employee? For example, a three month interviewing process vs. a one day event.

2. What do you think is the appropriate number of steps or days an interviewing process should have?
3. What can an organization do to make the employees’ prearrival stage beneficial for both the soon to be employee and the organization itself?

4. How could a company’s decision for either a collective or individual socialization process either help or hurt their employees? Which do you feel is the more effective approach to socialization?

5. Liz experienced divesture socialization, socialization that seeks to deny and strip away certain personal characteristics of a newcomer. For a company like Finer Foods, who was seeking to increase predictability and standardization, wasn’t the divesture approach to socialization the best alternative? If not, what could Finer Foods have attempted to do?

6. Liz also experiences serial socialization, socialization occurs when an organization uses experienced employees to serve as mentors to the newcomers. When is the best time for a company to “assign” a mentor to the newcomer? Specifically, at what point through the training process should Finer Foods have introduced John to Liz?

7. Liz experienced fixed socialization when the Finer Foods provided her with a precise timetable for when she could expect progression through the different phases. What negative outcomes can you associate with the idea of a fixed socialization process?

8. From the perspective of a future employee, what can you derive from this case study that will benefit you in the “real world?” In other words, what did you learn from this case that can help you in the future?

9. From the perspective of a future CEO or Vice President, what can you derive from this case study that will benefit your company?
Teaching Activity

The purpose of this activity is to provide students the opportunity to visualize alternative endings to the case study, as well as, to further enhance the understanding of how organizations can take different approaches to socialization.

The class will be divided into groups of three or four members. Each group will be responsible for applying Gouran and Hirokawa’s (1983) Functional Theory of decision making to strategize an outcome for Liz’s dilemma. Each group will be responsible for presenting their results to the class. The following questions should be addressed when formulating a decision and when presenting your decision.

(1) Understand the Problem
(2) Marshal a range of alternatives (i.e., stay with Finer Foods or go to graduate school)
(3) Assessing positive consequences of each alternative
(4) Assessing negative consequences of each alternative

Thus, competent performance of the four functions is more important, in terms of getting a good decision, than the sequencing of the functions.

Debriefing

This activity provides each group a unique opportunity to elaborate and defend their position for which alternative Liz should take, as well as question underlying goals and values that may affect this decision. Students will also have the opportunity to compare and contrast their results with those of their classmates. Mier (1982) acknowledges that if the case study method is conducted effectively, students should be able to question the underlying organizational goals and values that could affect the attitudes, assumptions, and policies of an organization. In turn,
the more students are able to question why particular things occur in an organization before they actually reach the organization, the more prepared they will be when that time arrives.