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EARLY CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL SOCIALIZATION: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN LEBANESE BANKS

Key Words

Formal Socialization; Informal Socialization; Career Satisfaction; Career Path; Career Goals.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to define the relationship between career development and socialization. These two concepts are highly perceived as acute, crucial, and dynamic factors for future managers. This survey is aimed to test whether socialization - both formal and informal - may enhance, modify, and ameliorate career development in the Lebanese Banking Sector. The regression equations conducted in this study show that informal socialization is positively and significantly correlated with career satisfaction, career path, and career established goals. However, formal socialization is negatively correlated with both career satisfaction and career path.

Introduction

The field of organization socialization has been highly researched (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Nonaka & Konno, 1998; Zachary *et al.*, 2003); however, less attention has been given to the influence of socialization tactics on early career development. Career development is an ongoing process that involves: (a) the identification of an individual's

skills, abilities and interests; (b) the understanding of his/her personality, values and beliefs; and (c) matching these variables with appropriate potential careers (Flores *et al.*, 2003). This process allows an individual to fashion a work identity (Tiedeman and Ohara, 1963).

In addition, the career development process, influenced by globaliza-

tion and rapid technological changes, has intensified the movement of an individuals career path away from that of the organization. Thus individuals are placing more emphasis on their own career development (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005). Kerka (1998) defined career development as being influenced by multiple factors such as: personality (including vocational interest), individual perception of themselves and the world, and socialization.

Socialization is the integration into the world of work where social interaction is imperative (Cohen-Scali, 2003). It is an important value-creating practice defined as “the process of communication and interaction between people” (Handzic and Chaimungkalanont, 2004:1). It is also referred to in process-oriented management frameworks as social leading and knowledge sharing, among others.

Socialization is a process by which a newcomer into the organization becomes a participating member of a group of professionals. Simply stated, it is the act of transforming someone from being an outsider into an insider (Sabin, undated).

The socialization process provides a rich and meaningful platform for face-to-face natural interaction, also called formal and informal network-

ing (Handzic and Chaimungkalanont, 2004).

When an individual arrives at the organization, he/she faces uncertainties about how to perform a new role, new colleagues and practices. In order to adjust to the norms of the organization and enable himself/herself to perform effectively, he/she needs to obtain much needed information (Jablin, 2001). Access to this information is determined by the organization through its choice of socialization tactics. Chatman (1991) defined socialization tactics as ability to provide newcomers with more structured opportunities for information acquisition and for social interaction with coworkers and supervisors that might result in greater social influence and person-organization fit.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) identified 6 major socialization tactics: collective/individual, formal/informal, sequential/random, fixed/variable, serial/disjunctive, and investiture/divestiture tactics, representing a continuum of experiences that employees may encounter. This research will focus on the formal/informal tactic.

The formal/informal tactic takes into consideration the extent of the newcomer’s status and experiences are made explicit. In formal socialization, individuals are separated from other organizational members after learn-

ing the responsibilities of their new roles, while in informal socialization, few efforts are made to separate newcomers from existing members and the learning takes place on the job within regular work groups (Kwesiga and Bell, 2004).

According to Zachary *et al.* (2003), formal socialization tactics are predictive of organizational commitment; however, when formal socialization merges along with collective tactics, it may encourage the newcomers to accept the status quo already established within organizations (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) and the set of experiences designed to achieve formally established goals (Weidman *et al.*, 2001). On the other hand, informal socialization is a process that does not differentiate a newcomers role from that of the more experienced members of the organization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979), thus enabling newcomers to be innovative and differentiating them from other employees in the organizations (Jones, 1986); Moreover, informal socialization is the collection of experiences that is unstructured and unprogrammed, where recruits learn through trial and error (Weidman *et al.*, 2001).

According to Zachary *et al.* (2003,) the socialization experiences and the impact of socialization tactics are measured soon after the individual is socialized. This measurement fails to capture the dynamic nature of sociali-

zation and underestimates the importance of certain tactics. Organizations vary in their socialization efforts for practical reasons and newcomers are asked perform their roles efficiently and to exhibit commitment to the organization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979) after instructing them on the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to perform their new role (Chao, OLeary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein and Gardner, 1994; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

Career development is considered to be a linear, progressive and rational process (Cook, Heppner and OBrien, 2002; Flores and Heppner, 2002). It is viewed as a long-term collection of socialization experiences, as the person moves through the various work-related roles over the span of his career (Hall, 1987).

Founded on traditional person environment fit theory, career development processes are mainly involved in identifying an individuals skills, abilities, and interests; understanding personality, values, and beliefs; and matching these variables with appropriate potential careers (Flores *et al.*, 2003).

Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) developed the social cognition career theory (SCCT) which attempted to address issues of genetic endowment, culture, social context, gender and unexpected life events that could influence the effects of career-related

choices. Later on, Stitt-Gohdes (1997) stated that the SCCT is able to identify the interaction of personal attributes, external environmental factors, and behavior in career decision making. It focuses on the influence of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations on goals and behavior.

The socialization process enhances an employees commitment, productivity, loyalty and turnover (Schein, 1968). Numerous studies on the effects of organizational socialization on newcomers and incumbents have been published (Ashforth and Saks, 1996; Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, Edwards, 2000). Despite the numerous researches on organizational socialization, considerably less attention has been given to the impacts of socialization during the early stages of employees career development. No empirical study, to the researchers knowledge, has examined the influence of socialization on early career development.

This research first addresses the issue of socialization and career development. Second, it contributes to the empirical research in socialization and career development literature by examining the relationship between socialization tactics and early career development. It seeks to establish the importance of formal and informal socialization within banking institutions in Lebanon.

The aim of this study is to provide a framework for the analysis of socialization and early career development. It puts forward an integrative arrangement that joins current research on early career development, formal socialization, and informal socialization in the Lebanese Banking Sector. Socialization in the banking sector is perceived as crucial for retaining qualified employees.

Based on the above, research is needed to examine the relationship between early career development and the formal and informal individuals socialization. The hypotheses to be examined are:

Hypothesis I:

Formal socialization enhances a newcomers early career development.

Hypothesis II:

Informal socialization enhances a newcomers early career development

Method

Participants

The method used for this research was a survey carried out between November 2005 and February 2006. Questionnaires were distributed to 6 banks across different branches and head offices. A total of 300 questionnaires was circulated and participants were chosen using purposive sam-

pling. They were encouraged to honestly respond to all the questions in the survey and were assured absolute anonymity.

The overall demographics were as follows. Of the 300 surveys circulated 199 employees responded with an overall response rate of 66.33%; which makes the sample in this study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 30, with a total of 90 females (45.23%) and 109 males (54.77%). Most of the participants were full-time employees (93.47%); the rest (13) were part-timers (6.53%). The majority of the employees were customer service officers, but there were also some tellers, internal auditors, credit analysts, and so on.

For this study, the researchers have chosen to focus on newcomers in the Lebanese Banking Sector who either experienced formal socialization and/or informal socialization, or did not experience formal socialization at their respective banks.

Instrumentation

A 17- item survey was developed and utilized to assess the relationship between formal/informal socialization and early career development. The first 6 items inquired about the demographic characteristics of each participant. The other 11 items were designed to define the relationship between socialization and early career develop-

ment. A 5- point scale was utilized for each item with 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree".

The questionnaire was designed to measure the perception of the 199 bank employees - the sample - regarding formal socialization and informal socialization (being the independent variables), and their role in nurturing career satisfaction, career path, and career established goals.

Each of the two independent variables, i.e. formal and informal socialization, was measured using four questions that averaged to a single value. They ran as follows: "Formal socialization is more effective than informal socialization", "You have experienced formal socialization in the first six months", "Informal socialization is more effective than formal socialization", and "You have experienced informal socialization in the first six months". As to early career development questions (i.e. the dependent variable), the participants were asked three questions as follows: "You are satisfied with your current career", "You feel you are able to move ahead in your career and get promoted at your bank", and "In these first six months you feel you have established career goals and planned some developmental activities".

The questionnaire was self-explanatory and all the variables definitions were written on the first page; yet the

researchers had to explain the definition of formal and informal socialization.

A model to check the reliability is Alpha, which is a model for internal consistency, based on the average inter-item correlation (SPSS Version 14.0). The reliability for all the variables from the likert scale type questions was satisfactory. The result of standardized alpha = 0.892 showed an overall reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire used was constructed by the researchers based on the review of existing literature.

Measurement

A Pearson correlation was conducted to test the relationship of formal socialization and informal socialization with the three dependent variables, namely career satisfaction, career path, and career established goals. Subsequently, to test the hypotheses, repeated regression analyses were performed using formal and informal socialization as the independent variables and the three early career development facets as the de-

pendent variables. Accordingly, separate regression equations were computed to show the significance of the relationship, if any, between the two sets of variables; thus, either supporting or, otherwise, refuting the hypothesis in question.

The following section presents the results of the study statistically and analytically for each of the three early career development criteria, in relation to both formal and informal socialization.

Results

The objective of this study is to probe the relationship of both formal and informal socialization with three criterion variables of early career development. Using SPSS package, a Pearson correlation was conducted to test the relationship between two independent variables (formal and informal socialization) and three dependent variables (career satisfaction, career path and career goal). Results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Correlation Between the Two Independent and the Three Dependent Variables

	Career Satisfaction	Career Path	Career Goals
Formal Socialization	-.198** .005 sig	-.258** .000 sig	.045 .524
Informal Socialization	.296** .000 sig	.493** .000 sig	0.580** .000 sig

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix in Table 1 shows that the independent variables were positively correlated with the dependent variables (except for Formal Socialization with Early Career Development), with informal Socialization being significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variables: Career Satisfaction ($r = 0.296$), Career Path ($r = 0.493$) and Career Established Goals ($r = 0.580$). Hence, at this stage it could be predicted that informal socialization is strongly associated with early career development.

Building Regression Equation for Career Development 1

With Career Satisfaction being used as a dependent variable, a regression analysis (using SPSS) was conducted using formal socialization and informal socialization as independent variables. The results obtained are presented in Table 2.

The analysis of these findings generates the following equation:

$$\text{Career Satisfaction} = 2.875 + 0.642 \text{ informal socialization} - 0.510 \text{ formal socialization}$$

(0.000) (0.007)

Both independent variables proved to have significant associations with Career Satisfaction. Therefore, the regression equation includes both factors. However, while informal socialization established a positive correlation with Career Satisfaction, formal socialization showed a negative one.

At a significance level of 0.05, the regression equation proved to be significant in predicting Career Satisfaction ($F = 13.598$ sig = 0.000), where adjusted $R^2 = 0.112$

Building Regression Equation for Career Path

Another regression analysis was conducted to investigate the factors

Table 2
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (constant)	2.875	.794		3.620	.000
infsoc	.642	.150	.287	4.287	.000
forsoc	-.510	.186	-.183	-2.743	.007

a. Dependant Variable: CSATISF.

Table 3
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (constant)	1.646	.603		2.730	.007
infsoc	.915	.114	.481	8.051	.000
forsco	-.551	.141	-.233	-3.905	.000

a. Dependant Variable: CPATH.

that are most likely associated with Career Path. Results are presented in Table 3.

The analysis builds the following regression equation:

Career Path = 1.646 + 0.915 informal socialization - 0.551 formal socialization

(0.000) (0.00)

Both independent variables proved to have significant associations with Career Path. Therefore, the regression equation includes both factors. However, while informal socialization established a positive cor-

relation with Career Path, formal socialization showed a negative one.

At a significance level of 0.05, the regression equation proved to be significant in predicting Career Path (F = 41.774, sig = 0.000), where adjusted R² = 0.291.

Building Regression Equation with Career Established Goals

Another regression analysis was also conducted to investigate the factors that are most likely to be associated with Career Established Goals. The results are presented in Table 4:

Table 4
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (constant)	1.801	.309		5.827	.000
infsoc	.588	.058	.584	10.088	.000
forsco	9.428E-0.2	.072	.075	1.304	.194

a. Dependant Variable: CGOALS.

The regression equation for this analysis reads as follows:

$$\text{Career Established Goals} = 1.801 + 0.588 \text{ informal socialization} (0.000)$$

Only informal socialization had a significant correlation with Career Established Goals. Therefore, the regression equation includes only informal socialization as an independent variable and it established a positive correlation with career established goals. At a significance level of 0.05, the regression equation proved to be significant in predicting career established goals, where ($F = 51.186$, $\text{sig} = 0.000$) and adjusted $R^2 = 0.335$. The above regression equation does not include the formal socialization independent variable because it is not significant ($\text{sig} = 0.194$).

Results from the regression analysis of this study (Tables 2, 3, and 4) show that informal socialization is positively and significantly correlated with career satisfaction, career path, and career established goals. However, formal socialization is negatively correlated with both career satisfaction and career path at the respective percentages of 0.510 and 0.551. Thus, if formal socialization is increased by 1 level, career satisfaction will decrease by almost 0.510, and career path will decrease by 0.551. Accordingly, our results support Hypothesis II, which states that informal socialization in-

evitably enhances early career development. However the results fail to support Hypothesis I, which states that formal socialization, is an effective way to enhance early career development.

There are no empirical studies, to our knowledge, that examine the socialization effectiveness with early career development. The current study extends the career development literature to the Lebanese banking sector and provides empirical evidence for the relationships between socialization - both formal and informal - and early career development.

Discussion

The most important finding of this study is that informal socialization, an independent variable, is highly and positively correlated with early career development; that is, the more employees socialize informally in an organization, the higher the career satisfaction, the clearer the career path and the career goals will be. This finding conforms to the researchers' expectations in this study.

The second important finding is that formal socialization is negatively correlated with early career development. The researchers did not find a positive correlation between formal socialization and early career development variables, thus Hypothesis I

cannot be supported. A reason for this finding could be due to the nature of the formal socialization program applied in the Lebanese banks. Lebanese newcomers did not feel that the formal socialization process is helping them to achieve or contribute to their personal goals and enhance their early career development. This finding certainly deserves further attention, to investigate in particular the cultural and structural dynamics that have shaped the overall negative perception between formal socialization and early career development reported in this paper.

This result contrasts with Sethi *et al.* (2004), who argued that formal socialization is a tactic preventing the high stress levels faced by newcomers concerned about their performance and career development. Thus, according to them, the formal socialization program supports the new employees and helps them to be less concerned about their performance and career development.

However, our research supports Hypothesis 2, which states that informal socialization enhances newcomers' early career development. The results concur with Jones (1986), who argued that informal socialization, coupled with the individual form of organizational socialization, enabled newcomers to become innovative, dif-

ferentiated, and unique in their response to organizations.

This research shows the importance of informal socialization in the Lebanese banking sector. According to Katz (1985), the socialization process would fortunately occur regardless of any management effort, i.e. in the case where even no efforts are made to provide formal programs to newcomers, as these newcomers would tend to socialize with the informal social organization. The latter is found to be crucial for employees to enhance early career development in an organization. The present research is meaningful in so far as it can ascertain the relationship between socialization and career satisfaction, career path, and career established goals. In agreement with Anakwe and Greenhaus (1999), we found that the newcomer is taught the skills, the norms, and the values of the new job that revolve around the main cornerstones of socialization as known conventionally.

This brings our discussion back to the early career development process and socialization. As already mentioned, career development is viewed as a long-term collection of socialization experiences (Hall, 1987). Moreover, whether formal socialization is practiced or not, the newcomer will always experience informal socializa-

tion; thus the newcomer - even unintentionally - will always become a contributing organizational insider (Nelson, 1987; Katz, 1985). Therefore, the socialization process plays an important role in the organization (Nelson, 1987). This concurs with our finding that informal socialization does have an impact on early career development.

In contrast to prior studies, which described the relationship between early career development and socialization from an institutional process perspective, the present study focused on the degree of the early career development throughout formal and informal socialization tactics.

Although research on socialization holds potential, no study was found to discuss the implications that formal and informal socialization have on the process of early career development. The results of the questionnaire in this study described formal socialization as being negatively associated with early career development and informal socialization as being positively correlated. This supports Jones (1986) findings, which state that informal socialization is to create an incentive for the newcomer to deploy nonlinear thinking and innovation that are to differentiate one organization from the other.

Moreover, informal socialization proved to hold an essential role in the early career development process, as various employees working in different banks, regardless of the bank structure, declared that they were more informed and learned through the process of trial and error, i.e. through informal socialization.

Conclusion

As the newcomer enters an organization, he/she will surely socialize. The question whether the social realm to be found is formal or informal will have an impact on the career development in the long-term (Hall, 1987).

At the early stages of this research, we believed strongly that socialization affects early career development, and expected that formal socialization would have a positive impact on a newcomers early career development, due to the continuous mentoring and training. We also expected that informal socialization would have a positive impact on early career development, given that the newcomer will always be a contributing organizational insider (Nelson, 1987; Katz, 1985). However, the findings provided a new understanding of the relationship between early career development and socialization. The results demonstrated that informal socialization played a role in the career satisfaction, career path, and

career established goals of an individual.

Further Research

Further research is needed to assess the formal socialization process used in the different banks surveyed. Also, we recommend additional qualitative and quantitative research in a wide variety of sectors e.g. educational institutions, technological, public sectors, etc...

It is also important to extend this research and identify whether the results still hold true in later stages of the employees career progress, i.e. whether informal socialization would have a positive impact on a non-newcomer career development and whether formal socialization would have a negative correlation on a non-newcomer career development.

Moreover, it is believed that there are important variables like knowl-

edge sharing that deserve examination and research, given the importance of knowledge management within an organization.

Limitations of the Study

It should be noted that the participants were newcomers who had the banking job as their first job ever. Since these employees were new it was very difficult to focus and find a sample of workers that was really familiar with and had developed in the career management process.

This limitation results from the restrictions to participate in the study. There are not many respondents who are in their first six-month period on the job and who are first timers. This is why out of 300 surveys distributed to the banks only 199 had been filled. Consequently, it is not possible to generalize.

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الملخص

التطوير المهني المبكر وفاعلية التأهيل الرسمي وغير الرسمي للعلاقات الاجتماعية: دراسة ميدانية مطبقة على المصارف اللبنانية

سيلفا كاركوليان ياسمين عثمان
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تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تعريف العلاقة بين تطوير المهنة والتأهيل. هذان المفهومان يعدان - بدرجة كبيرة - من العوامل الحاسمة والديناميكية لمديري المستقبل. وتختبر هذه الدراسة إن كان التأهيل - الرسمي وغير الرسمي - يحسن، ويعدل، ويطور المهنة في القطاع المصرفي اللبناني. إن المعادلات النقص التي أجريت في هذه الدراسة تظهر الارتباط الإيجابي والكبير بين التأهيل غير الرسمي والرضا عن المهنة، ومسار المهنة، وأهداف المهنة. المنشأة. التأهيل الرسمي مرتبط سلبياً بالرضا عن المهنة ومسار المهنة.

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