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Journal of Vocational Behavior 68 (2006) 96–115

Journal of

Vocational  
Behavior

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# The effects of early socialization experiences on content mastery and outcomes: A mediational approach <sup>☆</sup>

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Received 22 September 2004

Available online 25 March 2005

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## Abstract

This field study examined how early socialization experiences affect new employee mastery of socialization content and socialization outcomes. New employees reported the realism of their preentry knowledge and the helpfulness of socialization agents. A follow-up survey assessed mastery of socialization content along with role clarity, job satisfaction, and affective organizational commitment. The results, based on 194 new employees of a large educational institution and using structural equation modeling, were highly supportive of the hypotheses. Realism of preentry knowledge and agent helpfulness, the two indicators of early socialization experiences, were associated with greater role clarity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In addition, the mastery of specific socialization content dimensions, the often-assumed intervening processes, was explicitly shown to mediate those relationships. The specific patterns of mediation observed further advance our understanding of the relationships

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<sup>☆</sup> We thank Nancy Campbell, Sondra Clayton, Bob Towner-Larson, Tim Poland, Jennifer Stevens, Deborah Wasserman, and Natasha Weaver for their assistance in conducting this study and Kenneth G. Brown and John P. Wanous for their valuable comments on this manuscript. An earlier version of this study was presented at the 2004 Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Chicago, Illinois.

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0001-8791/\$ - see front matter © 2005 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2005.02.001

between new employee mastery of socialization content and the determinants and consequences of that mastery.

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*Keywords:* Organizational socialization; Organizational entry; Adjustment; Organizational commitment; Job satisfaction

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## 1. Introduction

Organizational socialization is the process by which employees learn about and adapt to new jobs, roles, and the culture of the workplace (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Research indicates that socialization occurs rapidly (Bauer & Green, 1994), the resulting adjustment is relatively stable (Adkins, 1995; Morrison, 1993), and early socialization experiences are related to important outcomes for both organizations and new employees (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Feldman, 1981; Jones, 1986). Socialization research has, however, tended to focus on those outcomes without sufficient attention to the processes underlying the development of those outcomes (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998; Fisher, 1986; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Current conceptualizations of the socialization process view the mastery of socialization content as a key mediator of the relationships between the antecedents and outcomes of socialization. For example, in the process model presented by Saks and Ashforth (1997), a wide range of factors influence the acquisition of information, uncertainty reduction, and learning. That learning, in turn, influences various proximal and distal outcomes.

Yet, only a few empirical studies (e.g., Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003) have actually examined the asserted mediating role of employee learning. The purpose of the current study is to further substantiate the mediating role of socialization content mastery and to begin identifying specific key links between early socialization experiences, the mastery of socialization content dimensions, and socialization outcomes. The model presented in Fig. 1 outlines the specific variables examined in the current study and the relationships expected among them. The rationale for the selection of these variables and support for the hypothesized relationships among them are provided below.

### 1.1. *Early socialization experiences*

Early socialization experiences are shaped by (a) formal efforts to facilitate newcomer adjustment such as recruitment (e.g., Wanous, 1992; Williams, Labig, & Stone, 1993) and orientating practices (e.g., Klein & Weaver, 2000; Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1983), (b) informal efforts undertaken by organizational members, and (c) proactive behaviors on the part of new employees (e.g., Morrison, 1993). The focus of the present study is not on specific experiences but on two overall indicators of early socialization experiences—the realism of preentry knowledge (RPK) and the helpfulness of socialization agents.

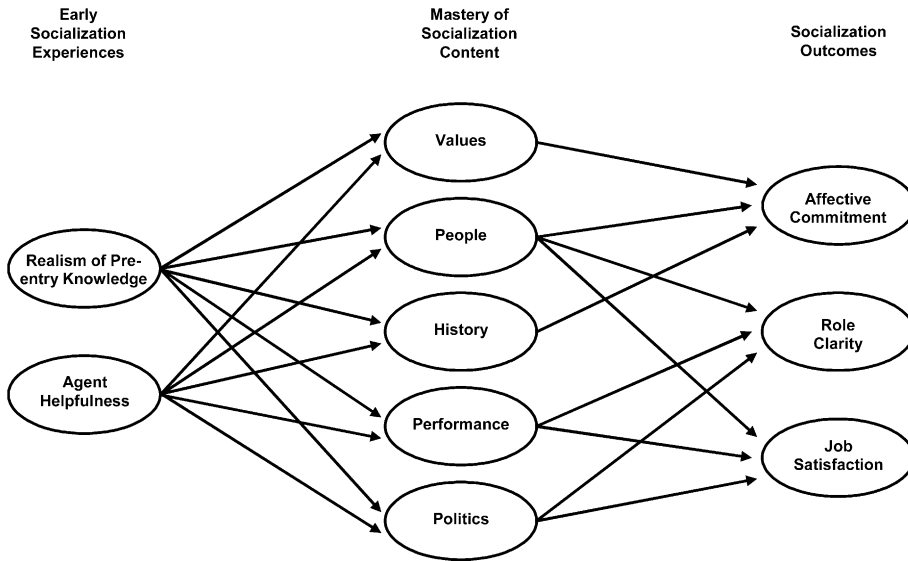


Fig. 1. Expected relationships among early socialization experiences, mastery of socialization content, and socialization outcomes.

RPK reflects both the amount and the accuracy of information new employees gain prior to entry about their new jobs and organizations (Bauer & Green, 1994; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1990). RPK captures not only any formal efforts by the organization to provide a realistic job preview (RJP), but also the extent to which new employees informally received realistic information from various communications and materials prior to organizational entry. RPK is thought to facilitate adjustment by helping new employees better understand what is expected of them (Wanous, 1992) and how to cope with job demands (Louis, 1980). Turning to agent helpfulness, interactions between new employees and others within the organization have also long been recognized as important to the socialization process (Louis, 1980; Reichers, 1987). These “agents” of socialization (e.g., peers, supervisors) provide new employees with advice, direction, and social support (Bauer et al., 1998; Louis et al., 1983) and facilitate newcomer adjustment by helping newcomers make sense of their experiences (Louis, 1980) and develop an identity within their new organization (Reichers, 1987).

### 1.2. Mastery of socialization content

Socialization research has often used criteria reflecting outcomes such as organizational commitment to indicate that socialization was successful (Fisher, 1986). In response to this criticism, efforts have been made to articulate the content of socialization and provide more direct criteria for assessing the extent of socialization (Chao et al., 1994; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). We examined the framework presented by Chao et al. (1994) as it best captures the full range of information needed

for successful adjustment. Chao et al. (1994) integrated previous work on socialization content into six distinct information domains. Those dimensions are: goals/values, people, history, job performance proficiency, politics, and language. For reasons discussed in the methods section, the language dimension was excluded from this study.

### *1.3. Socialization outcomes*

We chose to examine three important, frequently examined socialization outcomes—role clarity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. Because the socialization process can be thought of as a role development process (Toffler, 1981), role characteristics have commonly been examined as socialization outcomes. There is also ample evidence that early socialization experiences affect job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In particular, it is affective organizational commitment, the psychological attachment to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991) that socialization should impact. We next present conceptual and empirical evidence to support the specific relationships expected between early socialization experiences, the mastery of socialization content, and socialization outcomes.

### *1.4. Early socialization experiences and mastery of socialization content*

We expected RPK to influence the mastery of socialization content based on past theory and research concerning the information conveyed in most formal RJPs, namely information about organizational goals, culture, policies, and expectations concerning job performance (Wanous, 1992). We thus expected that employees receiving more accurate preentry information would be more socialized on the dimensions of goals/values, politics, and performance proficiency. In addition, a historical context is likely to be provided in communicating culture, policy and expectations resulting in greater mastery of the history dimension. Finally, the receipt of realistic information, formally or informally, is also likely to help set the stage for the development of successful work relationships with organizational members, facilitating adjustment on the people dimension of socialization content. Prior research has supported these assertions concerning the people, performance, and politics dimensions (Bauer & Green, 1994; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), but to our knowledge the relationships between RPK and the history and goals/values dimension have not been previously examined.

We also expected agent helpfulness to relate to all of the socialization dimensions because of the unlimited range of potential topics on which agents can advise newcomers. Higher levels of perceived agent helpfulness likely reflect more intensive social interactions between the newcomer and other organizational members. Furthermore, it has been argued that supervisors and coworkers are in the best position to communicate job and task information (Bauer & Green, 1998) and to facilitate value congruence (Chatman, 1991). New employees reporting higher levels of agent helpfulness should thus have greater mastery of the performance, goals/values, and

people dimensions of socialization content. That same logic also suggests greater mastery of the politics dimension should be associated with greater perceived agent helpfulness. Finally, as with RPK, a historical context is likely to be provided through interactions with organization members. One prior study has indirectly examined some of these relationships and those results (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003) are consistent with the predicted relationships between helpfulness and mastery of the people and politics dimensions.

### *1.5. Early socialization experiences and socialization outcomes*

Past research and theory has linked RPK to all three outcomes examined in this study. RPK has been shown to increase role clarity (Bauer & Green, 1994; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Phillips, 1998) by helping new employees understand what is expected of them and where to direct their efforts. For job satisfaction, RPK is thought to help align preentry expectations and post entry experiences (Wanous, 1992) as well as better cognitively prepare newcomers for the challenge of adjustment by helping them make sense of their new situation (Louis, 1980). Prior research has supported this positive relationship between RPK and job satisfaction (Phillips, 1998; Vandenberg & Scarpello, 1990). Finally, RPK is thought to influence organizational commitment, because of the resulting better fit between the person and the organization. While past research examining the effects of formal RJs on commitment has been mixed (Phillips, 1998), studies examining RPK have all demonstrated a significant positive relationship (Bauer & Green, 1994; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Regarding agent helpfulness, theory and past research also support positive relationships with all three of the outcomes examined in this study (e.g., Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Louis et al., 1983; Morrison, 2002). The relationships between the two indicators of early socialization experiences and the three socialization outcomes are not depicted by arrows in Fig. 1 because we expected these relationships to be mediated by mastery of socialization content.

### *1.6. Mastery of socialization content and socialization outcomes*

Employees who master certain socialization content areas should have higher role clarity because they would be more knowledgeable about appropriate roles and behaviors (Louis et al., 1983). Employees high on the performance dimension, reflecting an employee's understanding of the tasks that need to be performed and how to perform them (Feldman, 1981), should have higher role clarity. We also expected the politics dimension to be related to role clarity as this dimension implies an understanding of both formal and informal work relationships and power structures (Schien, 1968). Finally, the people dimension was expected to impact role clarity since the establishment of successful work relationships is necessary for learning about one's new role and expectations (Fisher, 1986). These relationships have all received prior empirical support (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Morrison, 2002).

We expected employees high on the performance dimension to have higher job satisfaction because satisfaction is thought to result, in part, from task mastery

(Feldman, 1981). While there are numerous views on the relationship between performance and satisfaction (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001), the notion that mastering the required job tasks will result in greater job satisfaction is consistent with a number of theoretical perspectives (e.g., Lawler & Porter, 1967; Locke & Latham, 2002). The politics dimension was also expected to relate to job satisfaction because of the frustration and problems that can occur from not understanding how to work from within a group's culture or politics (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Finally, the people dimension was expected to impact job satisfaction because past research has shown that social support and the development of interpersonal relations are related to satisfaction (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

Klein and Weaver (2000) found that the history and goals/values dimensions most strongly related to affective organizational commitment and we similarly expected these two dimensions to be related to commitment because being knowledgeable on these dimensions helps an employee identify with the organization. We also expected the people dimension of socialization to relate to commitment, as individuals who become socially integrated into a group establish an identity with that group and more strongly identify with the organization (Reichers, 1987). In addition, social integration has empirically been shown to relate to organizational commitment (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Louis et al., 1983; Morrison, 2002).

### *1.7. Hypotheses*

The above sections outline support for the expected bivariate relationships necessary to conclude mediation, the primary focus of the current study. The resulting 18 hypothesized mediated relationships are provided below, grouped into 10 sets of hypotheses. Each set consists of those mediated relationships that share the same independent and mediator variables.

**Hypothesis 1.** Mastery of the goals/values dimension will mediate the relationship between RPK and affective organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 2.** Mastery of the people dimension will mediate the relationships between RPK and (a) role clarity, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) affective organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 3.** Mastery of the history dimension will mediate the relationship between RPK and affective organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 4.** Mastery of the performance dimension will mediate the relationships between RPK and (a) role clarity and (b) job satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 5.** Mastery of the politics dimension will mediate the relationships between RPK and (a) role clarity and (b) job satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 6.** Mastery of the goals/values dimension will mediate the relationship between agent helpfulness and affective organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 7.** Mastery of the people dimension will mediate the relationships between agent helpfulness and (a) role clarity, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) affective organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 8.** Mastery of the history dimension will mediate the relationship between agent helpfulness and affective organizational commitment.

**Hypothesis 9.** Mastery of the performance dimension will mediate the relationships between agent helpfulness and (a) role clarity and (b) job satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 10.** Mastery of the politics dimension will mediate the relationships between agent helpfulness and (a) role clarity and (b) job satisfaction.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. *Sample and procedure*

The sample consisted of 194 newly hired employees in a large educational institution who were not faculty members, instructors, or student employees. These employees worked in 101 different departments and held 95 different job titles. This sample partially overlaps with the one used by Klein and Weaver (2000) as all 116 participants from that earlier study are included in the current sample along with 78 additional respondents.

Data collection consisted of two surveys administered 10 weeks apart. This two-part design was repeated for three different cohorts of new hires to capture new non-faculty and non-student employees as they joined the organization over a 12-month period. The same procedures were followed for each cohort. After receiving a list of new hires from the organization's human resources department, a questionnaire was sent to those new employees through internal mail along with an informed consent form, cover letter, and return envelope. The initial questionnaire assessed RPK, agent helpfulness, and demographic information. Across all three cohorts, this first questionnaire was completed by 194 of the 236 new employees (a response rate of 82%). A second survey was sent to all employees responding to the first questionnaire. This was also done at three different times so that the second survey was received 10 weeks after the first survey for all participants. The second questionnaire, which assessed mastery of socialization content, role clarity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, was returned by 156 employees (a response rate of 80 or 66% of the initially identified sample).

### 2.2. *Measures*

#### 2.2.1. *Realism of preentry knowledge*

RPK was measured consistent with prior research (e.g., Bauer & Green, 1994). Employees first responded to six items indicating how much information they received prior to starting their employment (e.g., "The requirements and demands of

the job”) using a scale that ranged from “no information” (1) to “exhaustive information” (5). Those same items were then evaluated in terms of the accuracy of the information using a scale that ranged from “none of the information was accurate” (1) to “all of the information was accurate” (5). For each item, the amount of information rating was multiplied by the accuracy rating. The coefficient  $\alpha$  for those six product terms was .86.

### 2.2.2. Agent helpfulness

The measure of agent helpfulness was adapted from Louis et al. (1983). The scale presented in Louis et al. (1983) includes both activities (e.g., business trips) and agents. Those items not concerning agents were excluded as our focus in this study is on agent helpfulness. Employees first indicated whether or not three potential agents (more senior co-workers, supervisors, and administrative assistants) were available to them to assist in learning about important information relating to their new job (yes or no). For each source that was available, employees then rated the extent to which that agent helped them to learn about important information using a scale that ranged from “not helpful” (1) to “extremely helpful” (5). Coefficient  $\alpha$  for the resulting three-item scale was .68.

### 2.2.3. Mastery of socialization content

The scales provided by Chao et al. (1994) were used to assess mastery of socialization content. Participants rated their agreement with each of the 34 items using a 5-point Likert scale. Construct validity evidence for this instrument is provided by Chao et al. (1994). To confirm the dimensionality of this scale for the current sample, we submitted the correlation matrix of items to an exploratory maximum likelihood factor analysis (Browne, Cudeck, Tateneni, & Mels, 1998). Six factors were extracted to correspond to the factors specified by Chao et al. (1994). The rotated solution is provided in Table 1. Six items that assessed job, unit, or trade-related, rather than organizational-level, knowledge exhibited unacceptably low factor loadings and were thus omitted from the present study. The elimination of those items left only two items to serve as indicators for the language dimension, which, given our analytic approach, is insufficient to sample the entire domain (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999). As a result, this dimension was dropped entirely. The  $\alpha$ s for the five retained dimensions ranged from .71 to .85.

### 2.2.4. Socialization outcomes

Overall job satisfaction was assessed using 3 of the 4 items provided by Hoppock (1935). We omitted one of the scale items from our survey because, in our opinion, that item assessed turnover intentions rather than job satisfaction. An  $\alpha$  of .79 was observed in our study for this altered scale. Role clarity was assessed with Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman’s (1970) six-item scale. Items were coded such that high scores reflect low role ambiguity or high role clarity. The observed  $\alpha$  for this scale was .90. Affective organizational commitment was assessed using the eight-item scale presented by Allen and Meyer (1990). Coefficient  $\alpha$  was .88 for this scale.



Table 1  
Mastery of socialization content items and factor loadings

Items	Factor loadings					
	History	Language	Politics	People	Goals/values	Performance
<i>I know very little about the history behind my work group/department (R)</i>	.189	.193	.006	.110	.234	.036
I am not familiar with [name of institution]’s customs, ceremonies, and celebrations (R)	<b>.719</b>	−.007	.157	.088	.082	−.017
I know [name of institution]’s long-held traditions	<b>.654</b>	.081	.198	.042	.207	−.194
<i>I would be a good resource in describing the background of my work group/department</i>	−.104	.156	.158	−.005	.452	.123
I am familiar with the history of [name of institution]	<b>.592</b>	.108	.105	−.057	.216	−.109
<i>I have not mastered the specialized terminology and vocabulary of my trade/profession (R)</i>	.103	.417	−.146	.098	.101	.092
<i>I have not mastered [name of institution]’s slang and special jargon (R)</i>	.513	.159	.307	−.032	−.031	.032
<i>I do not always understand what [name of institution]’s abbreviations and acronyms mean (R)</i>	.307	.202	.232	−.036	.032	.025
<i>I understand the specific meanings of words and jargon in my trade/profession</i>	−.204	.721	−.013	.094	.016	−.027
<i>I understand what most of the acronyms and abbreviations in my trade/profession mean</i>	.011	.804	.044	.015	−.063	.057
I have learned how things “really work” at [name of institution]	.045	.110	<b>.500</b>	−.087	.054	.099
I know who the most influential people are at [name of institution]	.069	.049	<b>.741</b>	.042	−.072	−.092
I do not have a good understanding of the politics at [name of institution] (R)	.334	.050	<b>.290</b>	.070	.010	.240
<i>I’m not always sure what...in order to get the most desirable work assignments in my area (R)</i>	.067	.025	−.053	.105	.149	.394
I have a good understanding of the motives behind the actions of other people in the organization	.060	−.005	<b>.353</b>	.009	.006	.191

I can identify the people at [name of institution] who are most important in getting the work done	−.095	−.008	<b>.506</b>	.104	.007	.111
I do not consider any of my co-workers as my friends (R)	−.023	.053	.026	<b>.513</b>	.091	−.063
I am usually excluded from informal networks or gatherings... within my work group/department (R)	.312	.021	−.238	<b>.771</b>	−.113	.063
Within my work group, I would be easily identified as “one of the gang”	−.168	−.026	.214	<b>.626</b>	−.012	−.050
I am usually excluded from social get-togethers by other people at [name of institution] (R)	.205	−.016	−.091	<b>.803</b>	.035	.008
I am pretty popular at work	−.336	.051	.217	<b>.571</b>	.088	−.020
I believe most of my co-workers like me	−.178	.086	−.011	<b>.491</b>	.121	.073
I would be a good representative of [name of institution]	.048	.094	−.054	−.023	<b>.658</b>	−.101
The goals of [name of institution] are also my goals	−.091	.055	.073	−.001	<b>.561</b>	−.105
I believe I fit in well at [name of institution]	.097	.064	.073	.264	<b>.447</b>	.088
I do not always believe in the values set by [name of institution] (R)	.056	−.064	−.086	−.061	<b>.569</b>	.061
I understand the goals of [name of institution]	.282	.045	.135	−.017	<b>.424</b>	.196
I would be a good example of an employee who represents [name of institution]’s values	.077	.057	−.141	.063	<b>.753</b>	.023
I support the goals that are set by [name of institution]	−.021	−.098	.046	.095	<b>.774</b>	.011
I have not yet learned “the ropes” of my job (R)	.055	−.173	.112	.273	−.146	<b>.550</b>
I have learned how to successfully perform my job in an efficient manner	−.096	−.128	.077	−.085	.157	<b>.748</b>
I have mastered the required tasks of my job	−.049	.394	−.048	−.024	−.165	<b>.633</b>
I have not fully developed the appropriate skills and abilities to successfully perform my job (R)	−.075	.031	−.033	−.066	.080	<b>.646</b>
I understand what all the duties of my job entail	−.183	.041	.117	.096	.088	<b>.589</b>

Note. *N* = 147. (R) Indicates reverse scoring. Italicized items were subsequently omitted for the current study. Bold factor loadings indicate the items used to represent each content dimension.

### 2.2.5. Organizational tenure

Because organizational tenure has been shown to influence both the mastery of socialization content and socialization outcomes, tenure was assessed as a potential control variable. While there was some variance in tenure within our sample, operationalized as the number of days employed when the first survey was returned, that variance was not large enough to influence our results. Specifically, tenure correlated significantly with only one variable, the history dimension of socialization content ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, when we included tenure as a control variable in the analyses containing the history dimension, the results were not substantively altered.

### 2.3. Analytical strategy

We used structural equation modeling (SEM), specifically LISREL 8.53 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996), to test our hypotheses as this approach provides a direct test of the significance of the indirect effects (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). A latent variable approach was used with random parceling (Landis, Beal, & Tesluk, 2000). We also used full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation to estimate model parameters from raw data with missing values (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). Support for mediation was evaluated using the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982). A test of the overall model in Fig. 1 would not allow us to individually evaluate the 18 hypothesized mediated relationships because LISREL reports significance tests only for total indirect effects. As such, when multiple mediators are involved, it is not possible to separate those indirect effects among the various mediators and evaluate specific mediators within the overall model. For this reason, we used a two-stage approach. In the first stage, we decomposed the model into sub-models that allowed us to separately test each hypothesized mediated relationship. This resulted in ten separate models, each representing a different set of hypotheses. In the second stage of our analyses, the hypothesized model was revised based on the stage one results and that overall, post hoc model tested.

## 3. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Table 2. Summary statistics for each of the 10 sub-models are presented in Table 3. Results of the mediation tests are presented in Table 4. The fact that the total effects were significant in all cases demonstrates significant relationships between the independent and dependent variables, a necessary precondition for mediation. Those results indicate that both RPK and agent helpfulness were significantly related to role clarity, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

The first five sets of hypotheses involved the effects of RPK. Hypothesis 1 was supported as the goals/values dimension completely mediated the effect of RPK on affective commitment. Model 2 revealed that the people dimension partially mediated the effect of RPK on role clarity (Hypothesis 2a), job satisfaction (Hypothesis 2b), and

Table 2  
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
1. RPK	9.67	4.41																											
2. Agent helpfulness	3.70	0.90	.40**																										
3. Goals/values (1)	3.56	0.67	.42**	.13																									
4. Goals/values (2)	3.54	0.74	.32**	.22**	.62**																								
5. Goals/values (3)	3.63	0.56	.37**	.38**	.61**	.51**																							
6. People (1)	3.63	0.72	.22**	.30**	.31**	.16*	.38**																						
7. People (2)	3.88	0.76	.29**	.38**	.28**	.24**	.34**	.65**																					
8. People (3)	3.67	0.50	.13	.24**	.28**	.13	.36**	.59**	.46**																				
9. Performance (1)	3.96	0.78	.18*	.11	.18*	.06	.22**	.27**	.28**	.27**																			
10. Performance (2)	3.86	0.78	.26**	.29**	.25**	.10	.33**	.28**	.28**	.35**	.48**																		
11. Performance (3)	4.01	0.77	.18*	.16	.24**	.11	.33**	.17*	.13	.24**	.55**	.57**																	
12. History (1)	3.44	1.05	.28**	.04	.43**	.20*	.40**	.20*	.24**	.06	.11	-.01	.03																
13. History (2)	3.28	1.07	.25**	.08	.45**	.31**	.40**	.20*	.24**	.02	-.04	-.05	-.03	.69**															
14. History (3)	3.51	0.97	.24**	.14	.39**	.31**	.32**	.08	.24**	-.02	-.05	-.01	.04	.57**	.71**														
15. Politics (1)	3.48	0.63	.31**	.29**	.25**	.15	.60**	.18*	.16*	.23**	.22**	.28**	.30**	.24**	.25**	.23**													
16. Politics (2)	3.06	0.73	.36**	.20*	.43**	.16	.40**	.28**	.20*	.12	.27**	.29**	.22**	.38**	.36**	.30**	.40**												
17. Politics (3)	3.17	1.02	.20*	.19*	.24**	.11	.37**	.17*	.10	.12	.13	.08	.06	.38**	.35**	.25**	.48**	.40**											
18. Role clarity (1)	3.73	0.90	.27**	.30**	.33**	.23**	.38**	.37**	.33**	.29**	.47**	.46**	.50**	.10	.10	.09	.32**	.31**	.20*										
19. Role clarity (2)	4.11	0.71	.28**	.27**	.29*	.18*	.35**	.23*	.31**	.29**	.51**	.67**	.60**	.01	-.01	.08	.28**	.22**	.05	.71**									
20. Role clarity (3)	3.93	0.78	.26**	.26**	.24**	.13	.35**	.27**	.28**	.26**	.53**	.55**	.60**	.04	.04	.08	.36**	.27**	.12	.80**	.78**								
21. Commitment (1)	3.02	0.82	.29**	.31**	.41**	.36**	.48**	.18*	.24**	.06	.13	.12	.06	.37**	.47**	.42**	.28**	.28**	.23**	.26**	.21*	.21*							
22. Commitment (2)	3.24	0.72	.27**	.35**	.52**	.41**	.58**	.37**	.36**	.19*	.08	.16	.04	.43**	.45**	.39**	.33**	.32**	.25**	.26**	.20*	.16	.61**						
23. Commitment (3)	3.33	0.84	.31**	.26**	.49**	.47**	.54**	.21**	.27**	.12	.14	.22**	.13	.29**	.38**	.34**	.31**	.28**	.14	.35**	.34**	.30**	.68**	.70**					
24. Satisfaction (1)	4.06	0.73	.27**	.34**	.27**	.25**	.40**	.29**	.34**	.23**	.17*	.14	.17*	.13	.17*	.07	.29**	.10	.21*	.44**	.27**	.29**	.32**	.46**	.47**				
25. Satisfaction (2)	3.69	0.79	.19*	.21*	.21**	.19*	.35**	.26**	.32**	.24**	.14	.25**	.18*	.02	.04	-.07	.21**	.08	.11	.39**	.29**	.33**	.29**	.40**	.48**	.65**			
26. Satisfaction (3)	3.51	0.62	.15	.27**	.16	.14	.30**	.21**	.26**	.29**	.03	.21*	.15	.02	.10	-.02	.24**	.01	.10	.22**	.26**	.18*	.29**	.27**	.34**	.57**	.44**		

Note.  $N = 139$ – $185$ . Parenthetical numbers following variable labels indicate the parcels for that scale.

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3  
Structural equation model characteristics

Model/ hypothesis	Independent variable	Mediating variable	Dependent variable	$\chi^2(df)$	<i>p</i> value	RMSEA	RMSEA CI	Missing data (%)
1	RPK	Values	Commitment	14.898 (12)	.247	.036	(.000, .086)	17.02
2	RPK	People	Role clarity Commitment Satisfaction	89.634 (56)	.003	.056	(.033, .077)	18.29
3	RPK	History	Commitment	15.079 (12)	.237	.037	(.000, .086)	17.02
4	RPK	Performance	Role clarity Satisfaction	64.504 (30)	<.001	.077	(.051, .103)	17.72
5	RPK	Politics	Role Clarity Satisfaction	57.633 (30)	.002	.069	(.042, .096)	17.72
6	Helpfulness	Values	Commitment	27.329 (12)	.007	.083	(.042, .125)	15.44
7	Helpfulness	People	Role Clarity Commitment Satisfaction	94.414 (56)	.001	.061	(.039, .082)	16.05
8	Helpfulness	History	Commitment	18.048 (12)	.114	.052	(.000, .099)	15.44
9	Helpfulness	Performance	Role Clarity Satisfaction	71.763 (30)	<.001	.087	(.061, .113)	15.70
10	Helpfulness	Politics	Role Clarity Satisfaction	51.927 (30)	.008	.063	(.032, .091)	15.70
Post Hoc Summary Model				436.56 (269)	<.001	.057	(.047, .067)	18.87

*Note.* Because we used full-information maximum likelihood with missing data,  $\chi^2$  and RMSEA are the only available fit statistics.

Table 4  
Summary of mediation results

Model/ hypothesis	Independent variable	Mediating variable	Dependent variable	Effect of IV on mediator ( <i>a</i> )	Unique effect of mediator ( <i>b</i> )	Direct effect ( <i>c'</i> )	Indirect effect ( <i>ab</i> )	Total effect ( <i>c</i> )	Degree of mediation
1	RPK	Values	Commitment	.063*	.880*	−.004	.056*	.052*	Complete
2	RPK	People	Role Clarity	.041*	.446*	.037*	.018*	.055*	Partial
			Commitment	.041*	.268*	.041*	.011*	.052*	Partial
			Satisfaction	.041*	.403*	.026*	.017*	.042*	Partial
3	RPK	History	Commitment	.056*	.422*	.030*	.024*	.422*	Partial
4	RPK	Performance	Role Clarity	.035*	1.181*	.013	.042*	.054*	Complete
			Satisfaction	.035*	.245	.036*	.009	.045*	None
5	RPK	Politics	Role Clarity	.049*	.608*	.025	.030*	.055*	Complete
			Satisfaction	.049*	.351*	.029	.017*	.046*	Complete
6	Helpfulness	Values	Commitment	.186*	.849*	.091	.158*	.249*	Complete
7	Helpfulness	People	Role clarity	.260*	.446*	.137	.116*	.253*	Complete
			Commitment	.260*	.257*	.172*	.067*	.239*	Partial
			Satisfaction	.260*	.374*	.149*	.097*	.246*	Partial
8	Helpfulness	History	Commitment	.078	.456*	.230*	.036	.456*	None
9	Helpfulness	Performance	Role clarity	.141*	1.175*	.086	.166*	.252*	Complete
			Satisfaction	.141*	.228	.237*	.032	.269*	None
10	Helpfulness	Politics	Role clarity	.192*	.577*	.151	.110*	.261*	Complete
			Satisfaction	.192*	.322*	.205*	.062	.267*	None

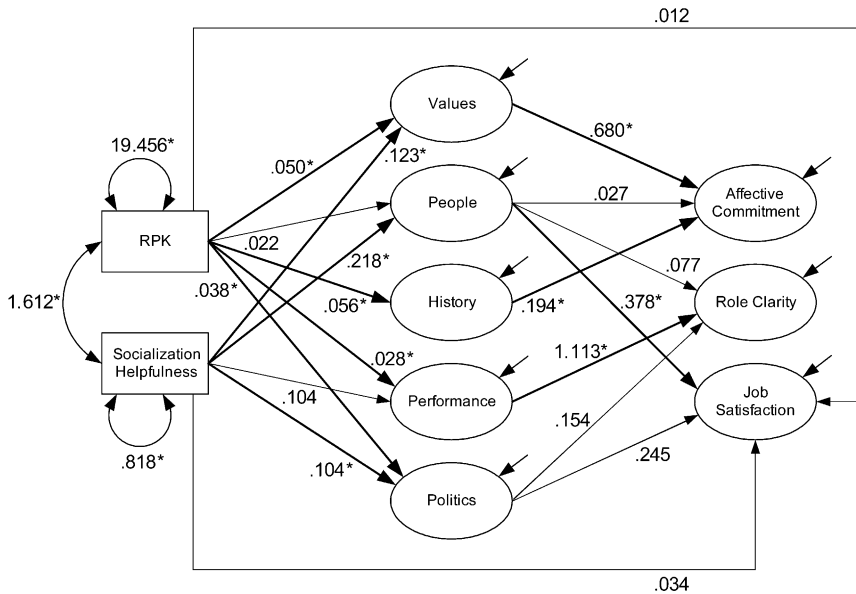
\* Represents effects corresponding to *t* values  $\geq 2.0$ .

affective commitment (Hypothesis 2c). Hypothesis 3 was supported as the history dimension partially mediated the effect of RPK on affective commitment. Hypothesis 4 concerned the mediating effect of the performance dimension. As indicated in Table 4, performance completely mediated the effect of RPK on role clarity (Hypothesis 4a), but did not mediate the effect of RPK on job satisfaction (Hypothesis 4b). Hypothesis 5 was supported, as the politics dimension completely mediated the effect of RPK on role clarity (Hypothesis 5a) and job satisfaction (Hypothesis 5b).

The remaining five hypotheses involved the effects of agent helpfulness. Hypothesis 6 was supported, as the goals/values dimension of socialization completely mediated the effect of helpfulness on affective commitment. Analysis of Model 7 revealed that the people dimension completely mediated the effect of helpfulness on role clarity (Hypothesis 7a), whereas the people dimension partially mediated the effects of helpfulness on affective commitment (Hypothesis 7c) and job satisfaction (Hypothesis 7b). Hypothesis 8 was not supported, as the history dimension did not mediate the effect of helpfulness on affective commitment. Hypothesis 9 concerned the mediating effects of the performance dimension on relationships with agent helpfulness. As shown in Table 4, the performance dimension completely mediated the effect of helpfulness on role clarity (Hypothesis 9a), but did not mediate the effect of helpfulness on job satisfaction (Hypothesis 9b). Finally, analysis of Model 10 revealed that the politics dimension completely mediated the effect of helpfulness on role clarity (Hypothesis 10a) but did not mediate the effect of helpfulness on job satisfaction (Hypothesis 10b).

The 10 separate mediation models were examined because it was not possible to simultaneously test the individual mediation hypotheses by examining the overall model presented in Fig. 1. Analyzing the sub-models does not, however, account for the fact that the different mediators, while conceptually distinct, are correlated. As such, some of the relationships observed in the separate tests may have been overstated due to shared variance with another, unmodeled mediator. For example, observed partial mediation could have been through other socialization content dimensions. Similarly, there are some apparent redundancies in the results. For example, the mastery of three different socialization content dimensions (people, performance, and politics in Models 7, 9, and 10) completely mediate the relationship between agent helpfulness and role clarity. The second stage of our analyses addresses these concerns.

Based on the sub-model results, the original model was modified to provide a post hoc, composite model. Paths were deleted from Fig. 1 where there was no evidence of mediation and paths were added where partial mediation was suggested. Specifically, the path from the performance content dimension to job satisfaction was deleted based on the findings from Models 4 and 9 (see Table 4), which showed no evidence of mediation and non-significant unique effects of the performance content dimension on job satisfaction. Similarly, the path from agent helpfulness to the history dimension was removed based on the findings from Model 9. In addition, direct effects were added from both RPK and agent helpfulness to job satisfaction as complete mediation of these relationships was not evident in any of the sub-models.



\*  $p < .05$

Fig. 2. Composite post hoc model based on the mediation results with parameter point estimates.

The revised model, presented in Fig. 2, was then empirically tested to (a) integrate the results from the separate sub-model mediation tests, (b) address the interrelatedness and redundancy among those separate mediation relationships, and (c) provide an initial, post hoc, empirical test of this model.

The summary statistics for this composite model are presented at the bottom of Table 3 and indicate that this post hoc model fits the data well (RMSEA = .057, CI: .047, .067). Neither of the direct paths added from RPK and agent helpfulness to job satisfaction were significant and the removal of those two non-significant paths does not appreciably reduce model fit. While we cannot decompose the indirect effects in this composite model and attribute them to specific mediators, inferences can be made about potential redundancies among the sub-models based on the relative magnitudes and significance of competing parameter estimates.

#### 4. Discussion

The current study demonstrated how the mastery of specific socialization content domains mediated the effects of early socialization experiences on important socialization outcomes. All but one of the expected effects of the independent variables on the mediator variables and all of the total effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables were evident. Furthermore, mediation, either partial or



complete, was supported for all but four of the 18 hypotheses. Counter to expectations, neither mastery of the politics nor performance dimensions of socialization content mediated the relationship between agent helpfulness and job satisfaction and the relationship between agent helpfulness and affective organizational commitment was not mediated by mastery of the history dimension. Nor was the relationship between RPK and job satisfaction mediated by mastery of the performance dimension.

Employees who reported having received more accurate information prior to organizational entry had higher role clarity, a relationship completely mediated by mastery of the performance dimension of socialization content. Similarly, the relationship between RPK and affective organizational commitment was completely mediated by mastery of the goals/values dimension. Employees who had higher levels of perceived agent helpfulness also had higher affective organizational commitment, and this relationship was completely mediated by the goals/values dimension. Finally, the sub-model analyses indicated that agent helpfulness was also related to role clarity, a relationship fully mediated by the people, performance, and politics dimensions. Since the only significant path to role clarity in the post hoc, composite model originated from the performance dimension, the performance dimension is the most likely mediator of the helpfulness–role clarity relationship. While independent confirmation of the composite model is needed, it appears that mastery of the goals/values dimension is particularly important in fostering organizational commitment, the people dimension for job satisfaction, and the performance dimension for role clarity.

The current study replicates and extends past research by substantiating the assumed intervening role of mastery of socialization content and by identifying the particular dimensions of socialization content that are key in relating early socialization experiences to specific outcomes. Our findings support elements of the process model presented by [Saks and Ashforth \(1997\)](#) and are consistent with the assertion by [Chao et al. \(1994\)](#) that the effectiveness of human resource practices aimed at facilitating socialization depends on how well those practices help employees master socialization content.

Several limitations of this study should be kept in mind in interpreting these findings. First, all of the data were self-reported by the new employees themselves. While the absence of data from independent sources is an issue, we obtained our measures from the best source for assessing the constructs of interest—the new employees themselves. We cannot rule out common source and method variance as an alternative explanation for our results, but we feel this is an unlikely explanation given the observed differential pattern of results. In addition, there was a temporal break of 10 weeks between the two surveys. A second limitation concerns the fact that there was not a temporal break between the measurement of the mediators and the dependent variables. While temporal separation would have bolstered the argument for mastery of socialization content causing socialization outcomes, there is strong conceptual and past empirical evidence to support this causal ordering. A third limitation results from the fact that the composite, overall model was post hoc. Replication with an independent sample is needed to provide a definitive test of this composite model.

A final limitation concerns the operationalizations of RPK and agent helpfulness. Both of these measures involved having respondents provide multiple ratings for each question (availability and helpfulness of agents, amount and accuracy of information). Our use of these measures was consistent with prior research but further study is warranted to ensure the construct validity of these measures. Furthermore, both of these measures asked employees to recall experiences that could have occurred up to 6 months earlier. A concern with this approach is that it relies on the accuracy of the respondents' memory and research has shown that retrospective reports can be biased. However, research also suggests that while imperfect, retrospective measures can be fairly accurate (e.g., [Hardin & Hershey, 1960](#)) and are generally not sufficiently biased as to be invalid (e.g., [Todd, Tennen, Carney, Armeli, & Affleck, 2004](#)). To assess this potential bias in the current study, we examined responses to these measures as a function of time since entry. As noted previously, days employed when the first survey was returned did not correlate significantly with either RPK or helpfulness, suggesting that the time since organizational entry did not systematically bias responses on these two measures.

There are a number of additional issues raised by these findings that also merit future research. Having shown that these two overall indicators of early socialization experiences influence the mastery of socialization content and, in turn, important socialization outcomes, future research needs to document the relative effectiveness of specific practices and experiences in influencing these two indicators. For example, it would be valuable to conduct experimental field research examining the impact of specific programs aimed at increasing the transmission of accurate information and the helpfulness of socialization agents on employee perceptions of these issues and mastery of socialization content (e.g., how does the timing of RJP affect RPK and socialization content mastery?). Additional avenues for future research can be drawn from other common early socialization experiences (e.g., recruitment and hiring practices), and additional socialization outcomes such as job performance, retention, and career effectiveness.

A number of implications for practice also follow from this study. Clearly, a newcomer's early socialization experiences are not solely dependent on the help and information offered by the organization and its members. Yet our results suggest that steps taken by organizations to provide accurate information and access to helpful individuals within the organization do impact the mastery of socialization content and, in turn, socialization outcomes. This study further integrates our understanding of the content and process of socialization and advances our knowledge of the differential relationships between the mastery of socialization content areas and some causes and consequences of that learning. The degree to which content mastery mediated the effects of agent helpfulness and RPK further highlights the value of examining the mastery of socialization content as direct criteria for assessing the extent to which socialization has occurred. Only by continuing to tease out the specific relationships between activities aimed at helping socialize new employees, the extent to which socialization has occurred, and the results of that socialization will we understand how to best help socialize new employees.

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