Dismantling Bias Conference Series

From Outsiders to Insiders: Understanding the Socialization Process of Underrepresented Minorities

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Recommended Citation

Kuang, Sarah and Ryan, Ann Marie (2022) "From Outsiders to Insiders: Understanding the Socialization Process of Underrepresented Minorities," Dismantling Bias Conference Series: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1, Article 4. Abstract of a paper presented at the Dismantling Bias event, organized by E. E. Kossek & T. J. Merriweather. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. Available at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgg/vol3/iss1/4

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From Outsiders to Insiders: Understanding the Socialization Process of Underrepresented Minorities

As the workforce in the United States becomes increasingly diverse, the demographics of new employees are also changing. In 2019, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that people of color made up 23% of the labor force and that women are also increasingly integrated into traditionally masculinized occupations (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020; Roos & Steven, 2018). Because of this, it becomes more likely that there will be new employees who are entering organizations that do not reflect their own identities. Currently in the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) landscape, many companies are focused on recruiting, selecting, and retaining diverse talent. After recruitment, socialization and onboarding is the first experience new employees have as they transition into their new role as a member of the organization. This increase of underrepresented minorities (URM) in the workplace magnifies the need for socialization, which is defined as "the process by which newcomers make the transition from being organizational outsiders to being insiders" (Bauer et al., 2007, p. 707). This paper aims to further research on socialization at a conceptual level by considering inclusion and the experience of URM in organizations.

To better understand how inclusion impacts the socialization process for URMs, I begin with an overarching model that summarizes the socialization literature. In their meta-analysis on the organizational socialization process, Bauer et al. (2007) proposed and tested a model of newcomer adjustment and its antecedent and outcomes. Specifically, they found that newcomer adjustment (role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) mediated the effects of organizational factors (organizational socialization tactics) and individual factors (newcomer information seeking) on socialization outcomes (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job performance, intentions to remain, turnover). While this model is well-accepted, it is important to consider its applicability to the socialization experiences of URM.

Newcomer information seeking, a proactive newcomer behavior, has been emphasized for its important role in the socialization process. In addition to information seeking, concrete examples of proactivity include feedback seeking, job-change negotiation, positive framing, building a relationship with one's boss, and networking (Ashford & Black, 1996). Socialization research has investigated individual differences among newcomers and found positive relationships between proactive personality and socialization outcomes (Bauer & Erdogan, 2014). However, research has also indicated that relational attributes such as status can impact the effect of proactivity. Specifically, the effectiveness and recognition of proactivity depends on the individual's position in the social network (Parker et al., 2019). While all newcomers lack achieved status due to their short tenure, URM also have relatively lower ascribed status as they do not come from the majority demographic background. Because of this, proactivity may have unintended backlash for URM, e.g. invisibility and/or hypervisibility. Based on these findings, I argue that there is variability in individual socialization strategies that influence career outcomes and that there is a need to standardize socialization. Indeed, Nguyen et al. (2021) found proactive behavior to be an outcome of interaction between organizational and individual factors and that

employees are more likely to engage in proactive behaviors when the socialization is structured and formalized. With this, I turn to organizational socialization tactics.

Examining organizational socialization tactics from a DEI lens, organizations may socialize and develop newcomers unequally based on the extent to which they diverge from the dominant group. From a theoretical standpoint, this difference stems from the similarity-attraction paradigm, which states that people are attracted to, or have the inclination to, seek interactions with those they perceive as similar (Byrne, 1971). Extant literature has not explored the topic of inclusion as it relates to organizational socialization tactics, but empirical studies suggest that URM newcomers are less likely to be included in others' formal or informal networks and may continue to be viewed as outsiders by supervisors and peers (Ibarra, 1995; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2011). Because many of the outcomes of inclusion practices are theorized to overlap with outcomes of newcomer adjustment, I argue that perceptions of inclusion, stemming from inclusion practices, are important mechanisms through which URM experience positive work outcomes.

Looking forward, though research examining inclusion is still nascent, concepts such as Nishii's (2013) climate for inclusion and Carmeli et al.'s (2010) inclusive leadership should be considered as organization look to promote inclusion at entry so that organizations can better retain their talent. As we envision the increasingly diverse workplace of the future, scholars and practitioners alike can advance socialization research and practice by considering the experiences of URM and the role of inclusion in their socialization.

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