The Influence of Social Media on Organizational Socialization

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how an internal social media tool impacts new hire socialization. Using an interpretive case study of a financial services company, this study finds that social media use helped the new hires experience social acceptance, role clarity, self-efficacy, and knowledge of organizational culture. The social media system provided both socialization affordances and constraints. Both social bonding and social struggle were observed to result from the social media use.

1. Introduction

With baby boomer retirements, organizations must fill the gap with new employees. This involves socializing the new employees to improve retention, commitment, and productivity [19]. The problem of new hires leaving the organization is of great concern: the cost of losing an employee may be at least 3 times the employee’s salary ([11], [14]) with 46% of new employee turnover occurring within the first 18 months of employment [14]. The problem is particularly acute in the case of IT workers. Through the year 2020, the technology field will continue to expand and grow, resulting in vast numbers of new IT workers entering the workforce [30]. According to a survey by CareerBuilder’s site, Sologig.com, 70% of IT companies report hiring an IT worker who did not work out. Of these companies, 38% stated it cost them more than $50,000 in losses ([7], [20]).

New hires that participate in a structured socialization program are 58% more likely to remain at the organization after three years [34]. Socialization is the process of new hires learning the beliefs, values, orientations, behaviors, social knowledge, and work place skills necessary to successfully fulfill their new organizational roles and responsibilities as an active organizational member ([31], [13], [21], [27]). Socialization tactics lead to positive outcomes such as better job performance, stress reduction, higher job satisfaction, and reduction in intent to leave ([11], [16], [12]). Effective socialization also increases organizational commitment, which is an important predictor of organizational stability and effectiveness [26].

While socialization benefits are clear, the means of achieving effective socialization are complex with many tools and techniques available. Historically, socialization programs have relied upon formal onsite orientation sessions, offsite training sessions, buddy systems, mentoring programs, and business trips with co-workers [22]. Recently, social media technologies have provided a new tool for organizational socialization. In particular, organizations are using internal social media systems to help new employees learn about their jobs, their colleagues, and the organization [4]. Social media provides a familiar tool that organizations can integrate into new hire socialization practices.

In spite of internal social media’s potential, it remains unclear which organizational benefits can be achieved from employees’ social media usage [18]. To date, internal social media’s impact on employee socialization has received very little attention [32]. Our work will explore the value of internal social media use by new hires. Specifically, we conduct a theoretically guided investigation of whether the use of internal social media systems by new hires increases the effectiveness of their socialization into an organization. This paper is organized as follows. We first provide the theoretical foundation. We then present the method, a case description and the analysis. The paper concludes by discussing the implications and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Many organizations implement socialization programs such as buddy systems and training programs to reduce turnover and increase employee commitment. Organizational socialization is the process through which individuals learn their organization’s social norms [5]. Many factors play a role in successful organizational socialization programs. Four key socialization adjustment indicators are: role clarity, self-efficacy, knowledge of organizational culture and social acceptance ([16], [2]). Role clarity provides an indication of how well adjusted a new hire feels about his/her new job. It is the new hire’s understanding of
his/her job responsibilities and organizational role. Uncertainty is often experienced when there is a disconnect between the job description and the specific expectations that new hires must complete as part of their role. As new hires understand their roles, they experience higher role clarity. Self-efficacy refers to learning the tasks of a new job and gaining confidence in a particular role [3]. It is the degree to which new hires feel capable of completing their assigned job tasks successfully.

Social acceptance refers to feeling liked and accepted by peers [3]. It includes having a support system that will help new hires succeed. New hires need to feel that they fit in within their new workplace. When a new hire feels socially accepted by his or her peers, he/she develop an attachment to the organization. Knowledge of organizational culture refers to an employee’s understanding of his/her role in the organization and understanding the organization’s goals and objectives [29]. It includes the new hires’ understanding of organizational norms, values, and working environment.

Some studies (e.g., [3] and [16]) provide insights into new hire socialization effectiveness and adaptation through traditional socialization practices such as buddy programs and/or on-site orientations. However, the impact of technology use on socialization has not been explored. As organizations strive to provide the right resources to their new hires, internal social media applications may play a crucial role in the socialization process. Because social media facilitate relationship building, open communication, and information sharing ([23], [10], [19]), these technologies have the potential to facilitate socialization of new hires. This leads to our research question: “How does social media use influence the organizational socialization of new hires?”

3. Method

Because internal social media is a new phenomenon that is poorly understood, we chose an exploratory case research methodology [33]. This method allowed us to gain rich insight about internal social media systems and their impact on new hires [40]. We conducted our study at a large financial services organization, which we refer to as Financial Services Plus (FSP), a pseudonym. We chose FSP because it had recently implemented an internal social media system into its IT new hire program.

Although we still have informal communication with FSP, formal data collection spanned three years during which we conducted face-to-face interviews with new hires, interns, focus groups, middle managers, and executives. In addition, we collected data by attending events, meeting with employees during off time (i.e., lunch or breaks) and observations. We conducted 64 interviews with 38 employees, which averaged 45 minutes and were audio recorded. Approximately 87% of the interviewees were males. Interviews were structured and all respondents were IT employees including new hires, managers and executives. Most new hires and interns were recent college graduates in their early to mid 20s with less than three years of experience. The IT middle managers had at least sixteen years of experience. The executives were in their 40s and time of service varied between them. During the interviews, we took notes and captured the interviewees’ verbatim expressions. For example, interviewees were asked to talk about their social media interactions, explain how they used OnBoard, and discuss the various types of social media activities in which they were involved with either on regular or semi-regular basis. These types of questions along with others helped us gain insight to the new hires’ experiences using social media. We shared our emerging data interpretations with FSP.

3.1. Data Analysis

Our data analysis followed a grounded theory approach [28]. We did not seek to impose an a priori theory on our data or to test a theoretical framework [33]. Rather, we reviewed the literature on social media systems and organizational socialization to identify an initial set of pertinent themes that formed the basis of our theoretical lens. This served as a sensitizing device to help us interpret the data.

We initially prepared accounts describing FSP, its new hire program, its internal social internal social media tools and the impact these tools had on new hires. We then analyzed the data using open and axial coding [28]. Open coding involved understanding how social media usage impacted new hire socialization. Using QSR NVivo to organize our emerging coding scheme, we read and coded data chunks into categories and subcategories suggested by the data. After numerous iterations between the initial set of categories and the socialization literature, the process resulted in three types of connections and four socialization dimensions. See Table 1. We coded examples of the new hires connecting with peers, superiors and information. We coded instances where the new hires discussed these connections impacting their role clarity, cultural understanding, self-efficacy and social acceptance. After coding the data, we read through the codes and wrote memos describing the data coded into each category. Upon deciding that the connections and socialization dimensions were the best lens through which to analyze the data, we analyzed the field note yet again. This process led to a saturation point where we no longer able to identify
new themes in the data. We then developed matrices and models to explain the relationship between the coding categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Positive and negative interactions with other new hires through FSP’s social media system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiors</td>
<td>Positive and negative interactions with any employee who ranked higher than the new hire in FSP’s organizational hierarchy through FSP’s social media system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>New hires using FSP’s social media system to gain information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3.2. Case Description

As of January 2014, FSP had been in existence for ninety-one years and had over 25,800 employees and a net worth of 24 billion. FSP is one of the largest providers of financial planning, investments, insurance, and banking. The organization’s mission is to serve and facilitate the financial security of its customers many of whom are U.S. military members, associates and their families.

With more than 2,500 employees FSP’s IT department is highly recognized in the U.S with a regular ranking in ComputerWorld as one of the best places to work in IT. New hires make up approximately 10% (250 individuals) of the IT department. Unfortunately, the IT department has historically suffered from a 60-70% turnover rate, reflecting the IT department’s struggle to acclimate and socialize new hires into its IT workforce. IT new hires frequently exited FSP during their second year of employment.

To increase retention, FSP charged an IT director with revamping FSP’s new hire program. The IT director leveraged social media technologies and implemented an internal social media tool, called OnBoard, a pseudonym. OnBoard is a Web 2.0 technology that consists of features inclusive of, but not restricted, to social networks, discussion forums, micro blogs, and profile pages. Executives require that new hires use OnBoard for networking, career development, workforce initiatives and continuing education.

A core team of six elected IT new hires with less than 3 years of employment are responsible for managing OnBoard’s social and technical system. The social system consists of face-to-face events and meetings. The technical system consists of the social media tool, which the new hires use to communicate, form and maintain connections, and find information. The core team’s main responsibility is to socialize new hires and to help them lead events. Given the socialization aspect of OnBoard, new hires could not charge for time they spent planning or participating in OnBoard events or contributing to the technical site. If events or contributions occurred during standard work hours, new hires needed to make up their time.

4. Case Analysis

This analysis shows that OnBoard helped FSP’s new hires connect to peers, superiors and information. These connections impacted the new hires’ role clarity, self-efficacy, knowledge of organizational culture and social acceptance. New hires experienced different socialization levels depending on how much they used the system. Typical system users read content, comment and attend events as their schedule permits. In addition to doing what a typical system user does, lead system users implement initiatives, plan and execute events, maintain the system, develop content, find volunteers and update management on the system. Approximately 10% of all new hires including core team members are lead system users.

4.1. Connections To Peers

One of the major uses of OnBoard is to connect new hires to peers. New hires’ first OnBoard exposure preceded their first day at work when they connected with employees that attended their alma mater. A core team member provided the new hires with links to their cohorts’ OnBoard profile pages. These early connections put the new hires at ease because they were immediately connected with individuals with whom they had something in common. New hires claimed that these early social contacts alleviated their first day jitters and made them feel comfortable.
because they knew someone at FSP prior to their first day of work.

During the first weeks of orientation, new hires used OnBoard to get to know their peers. When orientation ended and new hires returned to their assigned work units, OnBoard helped them maintain these connections. OnBoard enabled informal online communication that helped new hires develop friendships with co-workers. New hires used OnBoard to stay up-to-date with colleagues by “checking in” to see how they were doing or to see how their day was going. These social interactions with peers fostered a working environment where new hires formed strong friendships and felt “socially tight” with peers. A new hire described the opportunities OnBoard provides for building connections: “I still remember the kick-off event and thinking it would be a great opportunity to get to know other new hires like myself. OnBoard helps us with this. It helps us build a community and have friends at work, which become our best friends.”

New hires use OnBoard to have informal conversations, to look up current events, or to set up meet up events with colleagues. FSP does not organize the meet-up events. Once the connection is made, new hires reach out to others for “meet up” events inclusive of sport matches, bar-b-ques, lunch dates, or other forms of entertainment. OnBoard enabled new hires to search for others with similar interests. New hires that attended “meet-up” events with colleagues claimed that these social gatherings were about “hanging out with friends and having fun.” The ability to easily connect with peers in a non-threatening manner presented socialization benefits for the new hires, which we describe next.

4.1. Socialization experiences through peer connections. New hires that formed connections with peers developed new friends. These new friendships led new hires to feel socially accepted. This helped these new IT employees feel emotionally attached to FSP and develop a sense of “fit.” Many new hires claimed that they had a best friends at work and that these friendships gave them a feeling of being at home rather than work. OnBoard’s social gatherings gave new hires a sense of “comfort” and helped them learn about FSP in an informal setting.

In addition to helping them feel social acceptance, the connections with peers also allowed new hires to learn about organizational norms. New hires tend to follow their colleagues behavior when they are uncertain about proper policies or procedures. They observe and discuss organizational culture with their friends without worrying about any negative repercussions. For example, new hires learned that even though FSP had recently lifted its Internet restrictions and stopped blocking Facebook and ESPN, that their colleagues and supervisors would think they did not have enough work to do if they saw these sites on their computer screen. New hires resorted to using their mobile phone away from their desk to take a break and stay in touch with their outside interests. This ability to discover organizational norms through their new friends enabled new hires to gain knowledge about FSP’s culture.

4.1.2. Unexpected downsides: alienation, peer pressure and jealousy. Even though OnBoard helped many new hires socialize into FSP’s working environment, and in particular, feel social acceptance and acquire knowledge of organizational culture, some new hires experienced negative socialization consequences including alienation, peer pressure and jealousy. Because OnBoard requires new hires to take initiative and participate in both its technical system and social activities, new hires needed to devote significant time to using OnBoard. New hires who were introverted or had competing priorities felt alienated because they were not inclined to participate as much as others. Social media may alleviate the reluctance of introverted new hires to meet new people, but it does not entirely resolve the challenge of making social connections. New hires who were not inclined to initiate conversations or attend social gatherings nevertheless felt a strong pressure to cultivate a virtual persona, causing them discomfort rather than a sense of belonging and social acceptance.

In other cases, it was less a matter of different personality as of competing priorities that hindered some new hires from socializing into FSP’s environment. Competing priorities included heavy workloads and family obligations. As new hires’ tenure increases, their responsibility and workload increases leading to 50 and sometimes 60 hour work weeks. An FSP new hire commented, “I work 10 hours overtime each week and more when a project is due. I don’t want to extend my workday from 6-9 pm. I want to spend that time with my wife.” New hires in these predicaments felt penalized because they were unable to participate as actively as others.

Moreover, new hires felt that heavy users had priority for promotion. As explained by one: “FSP is such a big company, it is who you know. A lot of the jobs are filled before the job is even posted. If you play on an intramural team with someone they’ll say, ‘hey we have this position opening, we want you to apply’.” Given this link between OnBoard participation and promotion, new hires who did not participate in OnBoard’s events resented the opportunities afforded to new hires who did. This development of resentment across light and heavy users militates against effective socialization.

The division between the lead and typical users is also evident in the management of OnBoard events. Lead users encountered many complaints from typical users centering around event timing (i.e., work hours vs. after hours), event type (i.e., social vs. educational).
and the number of events. In the quote below a lead user discusses how peer complaints made him feel unappreciated. "The frustrating thing about being a lead user is we get tons of complaints saying, 'you guys aren’t doing this or I want this.' We used to say that if you are so disappointed about it, why don’t you put the event together and then they [the new hires] are like, ‘we don’t have the time.’ Well we aren’t going to do it for you. ...It is like these people are never happy.” Thus, the OnBoard system at once facilitated social bonding band social struggle.

This struggle is further evident in the lead users feeling the need to cajole typical users into participation in order for OnBoard events to be successful. Lead new hires who put on OnBoard’s events and maintained its technical system were responsible for ensuring event attendance. Lead users depended upon their peer new hires for the systems’ success but lead users could not control their peers. A lead user comments, "The most stressful things is that you’re organizing events where you’re the one whose neck is on the line, but you are almost never the one actually doing the work. You are heavily dependent on people in the community to help you out.” As the quote above illustrates, lead users recognized that a poor event would reflect negatively on their leadership and might create a negative reputation with peers and management. They therefore experienced a sense of social struggle to ensure active participation among typical users even as the typical users felt the benefits of participation accrued more to the lead users.

4.2. Connections To Superiors

In addition to creating peer connections, OnBoard fosters relationships between new hires and executives because new hires have to find executive sponsors to host and attend events. Through OnBoard, new hires interact with their superiors both inside and outside of the workplace. These interactions have included executive luncheons, casino nights, paintball competitions, Cross Fit workouts, and other special themed events (e.g., American Idol event). As illustrated by the following quote, a new hire explains his experience at these events. “To get to talk to executives and to get face time with them that you would never have the opportunity to do. It’s awesome! I know so many more executives outside of my department than most of my teammates do. There’s no telling ten years down the road what promotional opportunities I’ll have and what these connections will do for me.” During these events, new hires chat with the executives and “learn about FSP through their superiors’ eyes.” These events’ informal nature make new hires feel comfortable and at ease. A new hire talked about how hanging out with executives sponsoring a paintball competition helped him develop a more “personal relationship in a relaxed and informal setting.” This helps the new hires approach superiors with less hesitation, takes the pressure off in formal meetings, and makes new hires feel that management is interested in their wellbeing and that they were important.

The potential for making connections to superiors often make new hires want to get more involved. By their second year and third year, new hires can take a more active OnBoard role by hosting an event or taking on a leadership or mentoring role. When overseeing an event, new hires use OnBoard to coordinate with executives and top management. New hires volunteer to plan events (e.g., guest speaker series), which are managed and organized via the OnBoard system. A second-year new hire recounted how her leadership role in “putting together a special event” helped her “gain leadership skills.” She expressed her satisfaction that the executives knew about her role organizing American Idol. Another new hire described how leading a paintball event afforded him with management-interaction opportunities that he would not otherwise have had. New hires who lead events feel that the events help them “make a name for themselves in front of the executives.” In one example a new hire coordinating a distinguished speaker series got to meet FSP’s second- in-command executive. When new hire-led events go well, it affords them positive exposure which helps advances their career.

4.2.1. Socialization experiences through superior connections. Although OnBoard’s superior connections provided new hires a sense of social acceptance, the greater benefit of superior connections is knowledge of organizational culture. For example, superiors frequently volunteered alongside new hires at Wounded Warrior programs. By seeing these Wounded Warriors and their families, who are FSP’s customers, firsthand and working alongside superiors to help them, new hires gained a greater sense of FSP’s mission. FSP’s mission is to “serve those who serve,” meaning FSP provides financial products to help military families. Reflecting on his Wounded Warrior experience, a new hire said, “now more than ever I understand why I need to build the video system that will allow FSP’s customer to interact with loan officers from conveniently located branches.”

In addition to better understanding FSP’s mission, connecting with superiors helped new hires understand FSP’s norms and their place within the organization. For example, when leading an event, new hires frequently wondered, “how best to communicate with the executive sponsor and get expenditure approval.” More senior new hires and new hire directors’ managers taught the new hires to work through the executives’ secretaries rather than calling or emailing the executive. While gatekeepers still exist at FSP, OnBoard provides some opportunities for new hires
and executives to freely exchange ideas about FSP. An executive described his connections with new hires as “helping new hires feel like they are part of something within the organization.” This provides new hires with an understanding of how the organization works. Lead system users have a socialization advantage over typical system users. By planning, executing and attending events, lead users catch their superiors attention and learn how FSP’s internal communication works. This helps lead system users find their place within FSP faster than their peers.

**4.2.2. Unexpected downsides: role clarity-conflicting expectations, non-chargeable time and competing demands.** Although new hires benefitted from the connections to superiors that they made through OnBoard, this also created role clarity challenges especially for lead users. These challenges included conflicting expectations, non-chargeable time and competing demands.

While OnBoard was supposed to be a community-driven social media initiative, as time progressed management started talking with OnBoard’s lead users about how they wanted OnBoard to evolve. Management wanted OnBoard’s users to (1) plan events and modify the system so that it included OnBoard’s four pillars (i.e., networking, career development, workforce initiatives, and continuing education), rather than just the networking pillar and (2) shift more OnBoard activities to non-working hours. This is illustrated in the following quote where a senior VP is chastising OnBoard’s lead users: “You guys really need to step up and make sure FSP is aware that you are doing more than just social stuff.” Management’s involvement created conflicting expectations for the new hires because when OnBoard’s lead users cut back on the social activities and introduced more career progression workshops and innovation contests, the new hires complained "hey, we aren’t doing as much, Dave and Buster or pizza nights” and participated less.

Even though events became more work focused, management still viewed OnBoard participation as discretionary and non-chargeable. This created a sense of inequity among new hires. Management recognized OnBoard’s benefits, even asking OnBoard’s lead users to promote OnBoard to college recruits, and yet users were still having to confine their use of OnBoard to non-working hours such as during lunch or in the evenings. This affected lead users the most because their use of OnBoard could not be relegated to a few hours a week. Recognizing the inequity of management expecting OnBoard’s leaders to carry out their policies and maintain OnBoard, yet adhere to the non-chargeable time policy, OnBoard’s leaders sought out their own replacements. The incoming class of new hires were slow to become lead users and the current leaders had to actively recruit new hires to lead OnBoard.

The third downfall of OnBoard’s new hire-superior connections deals with conflicting demands. Because OnBoard allowed lead users to showcase their skills and develop their reputations, new hires encountered conflicting demands from their line managers and executives’ whom they met through OnBoard. Executives would solicit the new hires' help through OnBoard. Feeling flattered, the new hire would work on the executives’ project such as developing graphics, designing logos, hosting a United Way campaign, testing a modeling and architecture design college competition and SharePoint design. This work competed with work the new hires’ operational manager assigned. A lead user commented, “My managers would get a letter from the executive vice president, thanking them for my help this and that. My manager would be like, oh, I didn't know you were doing things for them. I was like yeah, through OnBoard they asked me to do things for them. My manager has been very patient.”

Although the new hires’ managers were patient, they too recognized the lead users’ skills and began asking them to do more for their work group. A lead user comments about how these additional responsibilities in his team lead him to transition away from OnBoard, “I was so ready to relieve the stress from that part of my life [being a lead user]. Possibly from being on the core team, my job responsibilities started picking up more and more. I just didn't have time for it anymore.” Ironically, as new hires’ roles become clearer to them, their connections to superiors also opened new roles to them, which then resulted in role ambiguity and a desire to lessen their involvement in OnBoard.

**4.3. Connections To Information**

In addition to facilitating connections to peers and supervisors, OnBoard connected new hires to information. OnBoard provided social information on everyday life such as restaurants that provide FSP employees discounts and carpools. As for work-related information, OnBoard’s discussion boards, tech zones and the guest speaker series helped new hires acquire-work related information, including how to obtain security approval to record meetings and modifying databases. In cases where new hires were too embarrassed to tell superiors what they didn’t know, they turned to OnBoard for guidance. In the following quote, a new hire describes feeling incompetent about his skills and his use of OnBoard to learn. “The first summer I went into peer review, my executive mentor and I were walking through these hundreds of lines of code, Java files, and countless...
projects. I am looking at the code and it was like nothing I had ever seen before. My mentor turns to me and says, ‘this probably looks like a foreign language to you doesn’t it?’ And I did not know how to answer that because if I answered him by saying that it didn’t, I would not be honest. So I told him the truth and he responded by saying, ‘yes, that’s what I thought’.” In this case, OnBoard helped the new hire learn more about the coding schemes and provided an avenue for future new hires to look up things that their supervisors assumed they knew.

New hires used OnBoard to gain information for continuous learning by tapping into resources and information repositories about job related topics. New hires learned to resolve job-related problems through OnBoard’s forums. Having the right information helped new hires understand automated ways to complete work-related tasks. For example, a new hire talked about how OnBoard introduced him to a tool that would automatically tell him everything about the databases his programming affected, included the owners. He claimed that this tool automated the slow time consuming process he was following.

As new hires developed skills that made them more productive, resolved problems and acquired new knowledge, OnBoard provided a forum to share these skills with their peers and superiors. Contributing information to OnBoard left contributors with a positive feeling because they could relate to the transition their peers were going through. New hires felt proud about their OnBoard contributions and confident about their abilities to help others.

4.3.1. Socialization Experiences through Information Connection. OnBoard provides new hires information access that helps with role clarity and self-efficacy. As a resource for solving work-related problems, OnBoard helps new hires take responsibility and ownership of their job role and understand how their job impacts other units and FSP’s mission. Our field notes provide examples of OnBoard reassuring new hires and helping them manage intimidation. In a reassurance example, FSP developers rely on database administrators to change databases impacted by programming changes. A new hire, who was trying to meet a deadline used OnBoard to circumvent the standard system and check the status of his needed database change. This information, from his fellow new hire, assured him that the database group was working on the needed modification. This extra information reassured the new hire that he’d be able to deliver the project on time. As an example of managing intimidation, new hires explained that OnBoard alleviates fear about asking questions. A new hire explained, “I rely on OnBoard to search for answers before asking my buddy or supervisor.” When struggling with assignments, OnBoard enabled new hires to reach out to people that could provide help.

Overall, OnBoard’s information gathering features helped the new hires manage the unknown. This helped the new hires leverage the connections and information to gain role clarity and self-confidence.

Typical system users and lead system users experience different levels of role clarity and self-efficacy. The difference may rely upon the type of information acquisition based on the network the new hire has established. Lead system users are more likely to have a wider network of peers and superiors than the typical system users. Concerns about not knowing someone with the needed expertise would bother lead users less than typical users because their expansive network gives them access to various types of information resources. Since lead users are more actively involved in using OnBoard than the typical system users, lead system users may have more opportunities to gain new knowledge about their job and develop new skills.

4.3.2. Unexpected Benefits: Executive Insight and Innovation. Whereas connections to peers and superiors presented some unexpected negative consequences, the connection to information afforded some unexpected positive ones. In particular, OnBoard provided executives with new insights and spurred innovation. OnBoard allowed executives to pose questions to new hires about new product offerings and development languages. Executives believed that the new hires could provide an unbiased perspective because they were unaware of FSP’s history and decision path. In one example, before the Android phone was mainstream, management asked the new hires if FSP should consider developing mobile banking applications for devices other than the iPhone. Thanks to the new hires’ insight, FSP now offers applications for a variety of consumer devices. Complimenting OnBoard’s virtual network, OnBoard gave management an informal network to gain insight into decision ramifications.

In addition to information access, OnBoard provided FSP preliminary feedback into new innovations FSP was considering. These included DevConnect and iInnovate. Management learned that the new hires used OnBoard to post questions about developing technology to the rest of the new hire group. Recognizing the benefit of tapping into senior developers’ expertise and the need to support developers after they leave the new hire program, FSP put resources into DevConnect and created a support system for the hundreds of developers FSP employees. iInnovate is FSP’s first social networking innovation tool. FSP implemented it after seeing new hires use similar tools on OnBoard to determine events they wanted to do. Using iInnovate, FSP’s employees can post ideas, add to the ideas and vote ideas up or down.
5. Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this social media study was to determine how social media use facilitates the socialization of new employees. The results indicate that new hires experience four socialization outcomes: social acceptance, knowledge of organizational culture, role clarity, and self-efficacy. We now summarize these outcomes and offer implications for social media research and organizational socialization research.

5.1. Discussion

Because the internal social media was provided to new hires prior to their first day of employment, new hires began feeling socialized into the organization fairly quickly. Through their use of social media, new hires were able to connect to peers, connect to superiors and connect to information. These social media affordances enable new hires to tap into internal social networks that allow them to form relationships, learn about their role, gain a sense of confidence, and learn about organizational norms [15].

5.1.1 Social Acceptance. As new hires use social media to connect to peers or connect to superiors, they are more likely to gain a sense of belonging. Part of the socialization process is to have new employees become an organization insider [16] and learn how they fit within the organization. It is the connections with others that help new hires develop friendships in the workplace. When new hires describe their workplace as “home” and their co-workers as “family”, it supports the idea that new hires are no longer a stranger in a new place.

5.1.2 Knowledge of Organizational Culture. Aside from feeling socially accepted, new hires gain a better understanding about the organization through the behaviors of their peers and superiors. The connections to others facilitated new hires in their understanding of organizational goals and norms. New hires claimed that OnBoard enabled them to identify themselves within the organization by reaching out to their connections. New hires learned what was acceptable and what was not when they would “hang out” with their friends at work.

5.1.3 Role Clarity. Our findings demonstrate that connection to information through various communication means help new hires connect with information that supports their understanding of their job role and expectations. New hires are able to gain resources that help them to learn about job tasks, to post a job related question, or to seek gain access to areas that help them get the job task done quicker.

5.1.4 Self-Efficacy. In this study, OnBoard helped new hires gain a level of confidence through their connections with information. The more new hires reached out on OnBoard to inquire about uncertainties in their job, the more resources they gained to help them feel accomplished. New hires’ accessibility to information from various units allowed them to gain a deeper level of understanding of not only other areas within the organization, but also of how their role impacted those areas.

5.1.5 Constraints. Even as the social media positively influenced socialization outcomes, there were constraints imposed on socialization by virtue of the social media use. In FSP’s case, OnBoard created socialized haves and have-nots. OnBoard’s lead system users seem to have a greater advantage in the socialization process over the typical system users. This happens when users that have more time, less family responsibilities or are more naturally inclined to participate in social media initiatives experience greater benefits over those that simply use the system for its basic functions. For some new hires, it may seem unfair that FSP would penalize the typical system users for their lower levels of OnBoard involvement.

5.2. Implications

To date, social media research has covered such issues as: managing employee relations, balancing social and work life, managing knowledge, changing organizational culture and promoting innovation ([8], [22], [24]). Given that social media is an important tool in the development of social capital [17] and that social capital can be helpful as well as burdensome [25], one might expect both positive and negative consequences for employees that use internal social media. Our research helps shed light on these consequences of internal organizational social media use. Individuals who are more inclined to participate in a social media system, or who have more time to do so, reap higher rewards. Yet they are not being rewarded for job performance so much as for system participation. In fact, their use might very well distract them from their work, or, as experienced by several of our informants, lead to additional work outside of their primary responsibility. It is the same features of the social media system that create both these affordances and constraints on the users. Thus, organizations must think carefully about policies for social media use as well as rewards for social media use.

An important implication of our study is that even as social bonding may emerge through social media use for socialization, so too do social struggles. In our case, the lead users accrued greater connections to people and resources than the typical users and, consequently, greater power. In such a situation, power struggles will ensue, in this case, social power struggles. Future research might further explore these struggles for social dominance using theories such as...
Crozier and Friedberg’s zones of uncertainty or Bourdieu’s theory of social space ([6], [9]). Social media may be intended to serve as an inclusive mechanism whereby all new hires may form connections, but because connections help develop social capital and social capital results in social power, the implications extend well beyond a new hire socialization program.

Our study also holds implications for organizational socialization research. Socialization research has tended to focus on the face-to-face relationships that are central to a new hires’ feeling welcome in an organization [21]. Our study suggests that through social media, virtual relationships can develop well in advance of the first day of employment, effectively speeding up the process of socialization. These early impressions that new employees build prior to their first day of actual work may have a significant influence on their subsequent socialization as well their organizational identity. In addition to accelerating socialization, social media can intensify socialization, enabling new hires access to far more employees, both peers and superiors, than is possible in traditional socialization. Future research can consider how this acceleration and intensification of socialization alleviate new hire uncertainty but also to create additional stress.

6. Limitations and Conclusion

This study has several limitations. First, the results relied on data collection from one organization. Other outcomes might be experienced in different organizations, providing a broader perspective of the socialization outcomes of social media use. Second, the study was purely qualitative. Although interesting insights have been gained about social media usage, our data does not detect causality nor do we have hard numbers of usage, but rather perceptions of usage. Future research using quantitative methods would be valuable to not only support the findings in this study, but to explore in detail the relationships between social media use and socialization. Third, the population in this study focused on the new hires. Interestingly, OnBoard usage created impact on other populations within the organization (e.g., executives and top management). Future research should consider the benefits this same technology afforded executives.

Notwithstanding its limitations, this study offers an organizational understanding to social media research. In contrast to studies focusing on personal social media use and external organizational use (i.e., marketing, branding, or recruiting) [12], this study provides an inside perspective of social media usage. Our data indicates that new hires’ connection to peers, to superiors and to information may positively influence new hires’ sense of belonging within the organization and job performance. Yet for three of the four socialization outcomes (social acceptance, knowledge of organizational culture and role clarity) the social media served as an affordance, but also as a constraint. Thus, organizations should implement social media for socialization with caution, recognizing that not all employees desire to spend their leisure time socializing on or offline with work friends and that this divergence in social preferences at work may unintentionally create social divisiveness.

7. References


[34] Wynhurst Group, SHRM Presentation, 2007