

A Case Study of the Socialization of Engineers: How New Engineers Learn the Social Norms of the Organization.

Academic Pathways Study: Cohort 2, Center for the Advancement of Engineering Education (CAEE)

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APS Study Site: Cohort 2

This study extended the APS study to investigate how engineering graduates learned the social norms of organizational work as they started new jobs in the workplace.

Research Design & Questions

Gather direct input from 30 newly hired engineers about their experiences starting a new job (qualitative data). Test for experiential differences between locations, divisions, and job experience.

Research Questions:

- How do newly hired engineers learn the social norms of the organization?
- How does the organization influence how they learn their jobs?

Two major findings:

1. Relationship building is the primary driver of socialization.

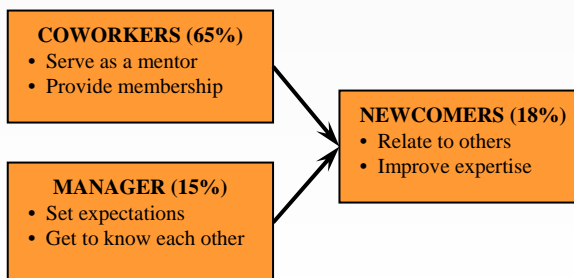
Newcomers reported that building high-quality relationships with others in their work groups helped facilitate their learning on the job and their integration into the work group. Coworkers were the primary source of learning (65%), followed by personal experience (18%) and their managers (15%).

2. The work group is the main context for socialization—not the organization.

Newcomers' experiences with the organization ranged from good to bad depending on the quality of their relationships at the work group level. Newcomers perceived the organization from the various perspectives of the work groups.

Newcomers' perspective of the learning process.

Three categories of actors influenced newcomers' learning about the social norms of the work group: coworkers, the manager, and the newcomer him or herself (percentages indicate the relative frequency of learning resources used by newcomers).



"because I feel if somebody just had given me a little bit more mentoring time during an initial phase, with some of the skilled people within the group, that I would have been much more productive."

"And sometimes he'd just come with me and see if whatever information they're giving me is accurate or not, because he's been on this project for a while."

"I was trying to get him to stick to at least once a month having a meeting with me, just so we can talk, just because I am new and some of the things I just don't know."

"like on the first day, he gave me one or two hours explaining the whole process."

Rating the quality of relational experiences between newcomers and their work groups.

Analyzing the quality of relational experiences between the newcomer and her or his work group found no significant differences by location or division. There was a significant difference between the relationship building experiences of new grads ($m = 18.56$) and experienced hires ($m = 11.50$) indicating that experienced hires had more difficulty building high-quality relations in the work group ($p = .03$).

Implications for education:

1. Place greater emphasis on the social system in the work place.

In this study, relationships with coworkers and the manager determined the quality of learning and integration for newcomers. The quality of relationship building mediated learning on the job.

2. Recognize the influences and variances of work groups on learning and performance.

Learning and performance in organizational settings is mutually determined by coworkers, the manager, as well as the newcomer. Newcomers' experiences learning the social norms of the organization varied based on the quality of relationship building experiences in the work group.

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