ORGANISATIONAL SOCIALIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CAREER PATH CHANGES

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Abstract: *The paper presents the main theoretical issues of the organisational socialization: theoretical models as well as instruments used in the field research. The research in the field of organisational socialization is important mainly in the context of changes in career paths in recent times, the output of the socialization process being related to work performance, job satisfaction and organizational involvement.*

Key words: *organisational socialization, career, career changes*

1. Introduction

Organisational socialization constitutes an interesting domain from a practical perspective, due to the fact that, as years went by, the multi-organisational careers became the rule and not the exception and the organisations are more and more interested in facilitating the rapid adaptation of newcomers. It becomes a domain of study all the more important, considering that in the last decades we have witnessed major changes on the labour market and in the career world. Two of these changes require knowledge of the mechanisms of organisational socialization: the multiplication of international companies and their spread all over the world and the multi-organisational careers.

Globalisation brought along inherent 'culture clashes' due to the fact that international companies came to have branches in more countries and employees coming from different countries. Some of them work in their own country, but inside companies pertaining to another culture, others work abroad, in the home-country of the company, and a third category works in a third-party country, which many times presents no similarities either with the culture of origin of the employees or with the culture of the country where the employing company was founded. Apart from the usual impact of the organisation on the newcomer who belongs to the same culture (the initial research domain of the socialization was initially limited to Western companies), when cultural differences are part of the equation, the issue of socialization becomes even more acute. In the case of multi-organisational careers, when entering every organisation, the individual goes through a period of organisational socialization which the organisation is interested to shorten as much as possible.

The concept of socialization is consecrated by Schein (1968), who defined socialization as a process of learning the ropes of a position, of training and indoctrination of the

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individual by the organisation, through the system of values, norms and behaviours considered as recommended/acceptable. This way, the organisation maintains its identity and integrity, countering the variability factor introduced in the organisation by the personalities, values and intentions of the newcomers.

The origins of the concept are unclear. Wanous states that the first writing on the topic is a book belonging to Bakke (1953 cit. in Wanous, 1980), 'The fusion process', in which the fusion between the individual and the organisation is presented as an interaction process, in which every agent makes changes in the other agent: the socialization of newcomers – the reshaping of the individual's personality under the influence of the organisation and the personalisation of the organisation – the modification of the organisational culture as an effect of the influence of newcomers. In the literature, socialization is more studied than personalisation for a very simple reason: the unit of analysis for organisational socialization is the individual, while in the case of personalisation, the unit of analysis is more difficult to define – the work group, the department, or the organisational ensemble? (Wanous, 1980, p. 168). What is more, the individuals enter the organisation one by one and the 'culture shock' is easier to operationalize at individual level than in the case of the personalisation of the organisation, where small modifications occur subtly over time and are consequently difficult to quantify. Organisational socialization is a process through which the individual adapts himself to the organisation, a means by which the organisational culture is trained, transmitted and consolidated. In its essence, socialization is a process of social learning, through which the individual, under the influence of some agents of socialization, develops new means to perceive/understand the organisational environment, new ways of acting, new attitudes, and is thus capable to better cope with his organisational role.

A distinction should be made between organisational socialization, where the individual reports to a given organisation, and the wider professional socialization, existing rather in professionals belonging to liberal professions, pertaining to the same professional category, but working in different organizations, or being self-employed. In this case, the individual defines himself rather in relation to the members of his profession, than in relation to a given organisation. Professional socialization starts with the choice of profession and precedes organisational socialization. Self-selection for a certain profession reduces potential conflicts between the individual and the organisation and reduces the need of organisational socialization when entering a given organisation. When possible, the individual can choose the organisation for which he is going to work, engaging in an anticipatory organisational socialization.

The concepts related to organisational socialization, because they describe and explain, from different perspectives, the adaptation of the individual to the organisation and his continuous relation with this social entity, are: selection and training of personnel, person-organisation fit, organisational career management, organisational commitment, organisational attachment, organisational identity, organisational personalisation, organisational culture, career.

Organisational socialization has many things in common with socialization in general: the individual assumes the values, aims and practices of the organisation where he works, he redefines his identity in relation to the affiliation to the organisation. Through socialization, the organisation ensures an acceptable blend of the aims, values and individual mentalities of its members, making possible both effective collective action

and the fulfilment of individual needs. Ultimately, socialization can be defined as a social control mechanism, having as aim the fit between the individual and the organisation.

Next to selection, organisational socialization is a means of completing a good fit between the individual and the organisation, from the perspective of the organisation, of course. Through selection, the employers hire individuals who share characteristics compatible with the organisation, which somewhat diminishes the adaptation difficulties of newcomers and prevents the inherent disruptions at organisation level. In the socialization process, new employees develop, through learning, characteristics needed by the organisation, thus becoming more fit with the organisational requirements. Organisational socialization was studied particularly in the case of newcomers, although it is a process which is present along the entire working life of the individual, being requested anytime the redefining of the professional role of the individual inside an organisation is necessary along his career (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994).

In most theoretical approaches, the socialization process is seen as a process through which the individual adapts himself to the organisation and to its culture, looks for a place of his own in the organisation's social system, redefines himself according to the organisation and to his profession, questions himself on his own value, on the manner in which he is evaluated and accepted by the others, on his future perspectives inside the organisation, and, last but not least, on whether he fits the organisation and whether the organisation fits him.

2. Theoretical models of organizational socialization

Saks & Ashforth (1997) summarised the research conducted in the field of organisational socialization up to that point and came to the conclusion that it is still difficult to identify a theoretical model, but that some major areas of socialization were identified, more often encountered in empirical studies: socialization tactics, socialization via training, pro-active socialization, content of organisational socialization and the means of learning, group socialization, moderating and mediating factors, individual differences in socialization. Although there is not yet a generally accepted theory, due to the fact that it cannot be stated that socialization has the same content, the same determinants and the same processuality irrespective of the organisation, some partial theoretic models became known so far.

The dimensional model is focused on the content of learning (Chao et al., 1994, pp. 731-732). The authors identified in the literature a number of six dimensions of organisational socialization for which they developed a measurement instrument with 34 items established based on the factorial analysis:

- *Performance proficiency* – the newcomer learns the content of the job tasks as well as the performance standards according to which his work is evaluated, in other words he learns the things that he has to know and to do in that certain position and which is the expected level of his motivation and involvement; of course, other factors which do not belong to socialization interfere with performance: education, previous experience, aptitudes, knowledge acquired via training for that position.
- *The others (people)* – Learning the 'hidden issues' of the position entails relating to other people in the organisation, from whom the newcomer learns, by formal or informal means, both the job tasks and things about the group and the organisation; relating to the others entails the acceptance of the individual by the workgroup.

- *The organisational policies* – the adaptation to the organisation also has a political dimension, that entails the understanding of the means in which formal and informal relations work, which are the power relations, and who are the individuals you should be connected to.
- *Language* – it is necessary for the newcomer to learn the specific terminology and the jargon specific to the organisation, because these facilitate communication with the others and the completion of the working tasks.
- *The aims and values of the organisation* – socialization implicitly entails learning the rules and principles which are at the basis of the organisation, the group norms; some of these values and aims can be implicit, being promoted by influent people, holding powerful positions inside the organisation.
- *History* – as in the case of socialization in general, the rituals, myths, customs and traditions serve at the transmission of culture: they prescribe desirable behaviours in certain situations, interactions and contexts and serve as guidelines for the adaptation of the newcomer.

The stadial models look at socialization from the perspective of the stages that the new employee goes through in the process of adapting to the organisation (Feldman, 1976; Schein, 1978; Wanous, 1980; 1992). In a similar manner to socialization in general, the individual goes through distinct stages when adapting to a social group, which is initially an aspirational group, that later becomes a group of belonging, as an effect of socialization. The organisation can prevent the misfits between the individual and the organisation via the personnel selection strategies, choosing the candidates who are not only compatible with the job requirements, but also with the organisational culture. The interest of the organisation is to attract, in the recruitment process, as many valuable candidates as possible. To this end, the information that they provide tends to create the best possible image of the organisation, which could later become a source of dissonance for the new employee. On the other hand, the employee tries to present himself in the best possible terms during the selection process, which could lead to the employer not being able to see certain aspects which could make the adaptation of the newcomer difficult. These attempts of the individual and of the organisation to produce a mutual positive image could cause disruptions in the expectations that each party has and could influence the adaptation process.

   The theoretical models of the socialization stages define the stages of the adaptation process from the perspective of the individual, not the one of the organisation. The stadial classification is based more on the main events which take place in the socialization process, on the content of learning, on the modifications which take place at the level of the individual, than on a certain time span. Each stage entails important acquisitions from the perspective of adaptation, progressively leading to a proper functioning of the individual inside the organisation.

   Thus, Feldman (1976) defined three stages of the socialization process: anticipatory socialization (getting in), adaptation (breaking in) and management of the organisational role (settling in); Schein (1978) found the entrance stage, the stage of actual socialization and the stage of mutual acceptance between the individual and the organisation; Wanous (1980) identified four stages: confrontation with the reality of the organisation, clarification of one's role, positioning inside the organisational context and success of socialization.

- In the *anticipatory socialization (getting in) stage*, (Feldman, 1976), the individual finds out all sorts of pieces of information, from the press, his friends who work, through internship inside a certain organisation, etc. This information will allow the shaping of a representation on what and how the organisation is and which possible part he could play inside the organisation. If the information is not accurate, it is highly likely that the individual shapes an unrealistic representation which could come in conflict with reality after the hiring process and slow down the adaptation process.
- In the *adaptation stage* the individual learns about the requirements of the position and develops the necessary competences, adapts to the work group, clarifies the particularities of his role and the limits of autonomy in exercising it (what 'is allowed' and what 'is not allowed') and comes to a realistic evaluation of his own performances, evaluation which converges with the one done by the organisation.
- In the *management of the organisational role* stage, the individual knows the organisation, knows his role inside it, but has to deal with inherent conflicts between different sides of the role or between the organisational role and other roles that he holds (for example the family role).

Schein's model (1978) is also a stadial one, which comprises one pre-entry stage and two post-entry stages, analysed from the perspective of the individual's career. The first stage, *entrance*, entails obtaining detailed and accurate information on the organisation and providing information about oneself; the recruitment and selection process is the moment when such information exchanges take place, but there is the risk that the mutual expectations of the individual and of the organisation, based on this information would be unrealistic. Both the individual and the organisation aim for a long-term collaboration, but when entering the organisation, it is very likely that deadlock moments appear in the adaptation process, because the individual did not choose the best organisation for himself or the organisation did not choose the best candidate. It should be mentioned that the employment decision does not necessarily entail choosing the best option out of multiple options, but rather a 'Hobson's choice': sometimes there is no more than one candidate for a position, and the decision of the organisation consists in hiring the only candidate or not; there are times when the individual cannot choose between various open positions, and his decision consists in taking the available position or remaining unemployed. Many times, the individual decision considers other variables than the characteristics of the organisation, such as: proximity to the house, the dynamics of the offer and demand of positions at local level, etc.

In the second stage, *socialization per se*, there are some difficulties which could not be anticipated partially and which the individual has to overcome: he faces the reality of the organisation – the requirements of his position and the people with whom he works, in other words, he learns how to work in a concrete situation; he learns that there are differences between the formal, explicit prescriptions of his organisational role and the implicit prescriptions: sometimes the formal prescriptions can be too strictly or too vaguely defined, which determines the individual either to accept restricting prescriptions or to innovate and define his role by himself. The hierarchical relations and the functioning of a system of incentives can also cause trouble to the newcomer and can contribute to his work satisfaction and implicitly, to the intention to stay in the organisation or to leave it. In its turn, the organisation is preoccupied to ensure the best possible fit between the newcomer and the organisational climate, to obtain work performance and innovative contributions that help the organisation function better.

The third stage, *mutual acceptance*, marks the transition from the status of 'newcomer' to the status of 'insider'. The individual and the organisation give mutual acceptance signs: the individual improves his work performance, stays inside the organisation, struggles to play his organisational role in the best possible way, is motivated to work, is loyal to the organisation and finds his place inside of it. The organisation, in its turn, sends acceptance signs to the newcomer: it positively evaluates the performance of the individual, offers him incentives, including salary related incentives, promotes him, gives him a clear position; some organisations have 'rites of passage' from the status of newcomer to the status of insider, of initiating the individual in the 'secrets' of the organisation. These are clear signs of long-term acceptance.

In the process of adaptation to work, seen by Schein (1978) as a process of development of the person, socialization is a process which deals with various tasks (pp. 94-102):

- The acceptance of the organisational reality, process which is more difficult if the expectations prove to be unrealistic.
- Confrontation with resistance to change – The newcomer can have new and very useful ideas, but in their practical realisation comes across many subjective obstacles from the part of the others.
- Learning the acceptable means of working – the work tasks can be too broadly or too strictly defined, the company can be very strictly organised or disorganised and, under these circumstances, the new employee has to clarify, sometimes on his own, his organisational role.
- Learning the power relations, the system of incentives and the way in which you must relate to the others.
- Finding his own place inside the organization – receiving acceptance from the others –superiors and colleagues and adhering to a group.

Wanous (1980; 1992) comes forward with an integrative model of organisational socialization, which comprises four post-entry stages and no anticipatory socialization stage, present in the case of other models. The 'critical acquisitions' and feelings of the individual reported to the organisation are indicated in these stages (pp. 180-181).

- Stage 1: Confrontation and acceptance of the organisational reality. The main events which influence adaptation are: confirmation or disconfirmation of the expectations: conflicts between the personal needs and values and those of the organisation; discovery of one's own characteristics, which are congruent or not with the requirements of the organisation.
- Stage 2: Acquisition of role clarity. In this stage, the individual learns what he has to do (tasks, duties), the interpersonal roles that he accomplishes inside the organisation. He learns to work in the more or less structured context of his position and harmonises self-evaluation with the evaluation done on him by the organisation.
- Stage 3: Positioning inside the organisational context. At this stage, which usually occurs after the first year, a smooth adaptation of the individual's behaviours with the expectations of the organisation takes place. Some conflicts between the requirements of the position and the requirements of extra-organisational roles are solved. Organisational involvement, adoption of organisational values, shaping of a modified self-image and new interpersonal relations also occur.
- Stage 4: The manifestation of some indicators of socialization success. The individual is considered trustworthy by the others, is satisfied with his work, involved in the success of the organisation, and has a feeling that he is accepted and integrated in the organisation, that he belongs to the organisation.

3. Measuring organizational socialization

There are several instruments derived from the theoretical models of organizational socialization that were used in research. Most of them can be included in the domain of dimensional models, which investigate the content areas of socialization, while others are concerned with the outputs of the process.

- The Content Areas of Socialization Questionnaire designed by Chao et al. (1994), which comprises 34 items, organised in six content areas: History, Language, Policies, People, Values and aims of the organisation, and Performance level.
- The Organisational Commitment Questionnaire designed by Vandenberghe (1996), is based on a previous questionnaire designed by (Allen & Meyer, 1990). It consists of 18 items, organised on three dimensions: Affective involvement, Involvement in continuity, and Normative involvement.
- The Organizational Socialization Inventory (Taormina 1994; 1997), has 20 items, organised on four dimensions: Training, Perception/Understanding, Support of the colleagues, and Future perspectives.

Through these measurements one can find the particularities of socialization in different organizations (Luca, Pavalache-Ilie, & Munteanu, 2008) as well as cultural differences involved in the process (Claes, Hiel, Smets, & Luca, 2006).

The current theoretical models mostly follow the guidelines of these processual models which became traditional and were developed by adding new thematic areas such as socialization tactics, initiated by the work of authors Van Maanen and Schein (1979). In a meta-analysis of the studies from two decades, Saks, Uggerslev, and Fassina (2007), as well as Saeed and colleagues (2012), concluded that the use of some institutionalised socialization tactics is positively associated with the realistic perception of the organisation, with work performance, and negatively associated with the ambiguity of the role, the tactics being the most significant predictors of adaptation to the requirements of the organisation.

In a recent study, Saks & Gruman (2011) bring forward a new theoretical model – the SRT – Socialization resources theory, which is rooted in the theory of positive organisational behaviour (POB), based on cognitive learning, which highlights the role of knowledge acquisition and on the concept of psychological capital (PsyCap). They suggest that the socialization process should be considered a process of development of the psychological capital of newcomers. The socialization resources aim to develop self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience of newcomers in the organisation. The four categories of socialization resources are: orientation training, position characteristics, social support and leadership (p. 6). Through the increase of social capital, these socialization resources have an effect on work satisfaction, organisational involvement, work performance and the intention to stay in/leave the organisation.

The development of new research on organizational socializations in different professional and organizational areas, the adaptation of classical instruments to different languages and cultures, as well as the creation of new instruments, can contribute to the enhancement of the adaptation of newcomers to the organizational context, to the increase of work performance, satisfaction and commitment.

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