College Graduates' Experiences and Attitudes During Organizational Entry

Elwood F. Holton III

Much of the emphasis in HRD on new-employee development has been on task-related training or orientation programs. Little attention has been focused on integrating socialization research and interventions. The first step in integrating the two perspectives is obtaining a clearer description of what is occurring in the field. This descriptive study is designed to understand more fully how new college graduates experience organizational entry. A comprehensive survey instrument was sent to 2,214 bachelor's degree graduates one year after graduation, with a response rate of 38.2 percent. The sample was reduced to 378 graduates working in for-profit organizations and not in temporary employment. Twenty-four socialization scales were derived using exploratory factor analysis; descriptive statistics are reported for each scale and seven other established scales. Data are reported on the graduates' preemployment attitudes, organizational entry experiences, perceptions of their jobs, organizational understanding, new-employee attitudes, expectations, and adaptation strategies. Results indicate wide variability in socialization experiences and adaptation success and the need for HRD interventions. Implications for HRD research are discussed.

One of the major functions of HRD is the development of new employees into productive members of an organization. Much of the emphasis has been in three areas: the traditional training role to provide the basic knowledge and skills necessary for job performance, orientation programs to provide basic information about the organization to new employees (Day, 1988; Smith, 1984), and, to a lesser extent, mentoring programs to facilitate the entry process (Geiger, 1992; Lawrie, 1987).

Largely overlooked by HRD is organizational entry, which consists of the reciprocal process of new-employee socialization by the organization, interacting with adaptation and coping processes engaged in by the new employee.
Feldman (1989) notes that training scholars have traditionally taken a different perspective on the entry process from socialization scholars. To date, the research on training new employees has focused mostly on skill development for task competence and has largely ignored the socialization process. Socialization research has focused on the nontask aspects of the entry process, such as attitudes and values, how new employees learn their roles, adapt to the organization's culture, earn respect and credibility, and become members of the organization's social system.

The two perspectives should be more closely integrated because the process by which a new employee becomes an outstanding performer is one of acquiring both task-related competence from job training and nontask-related competence from socialization; neither should stand alone (Feldman, 189). Outstanding task performance cannot be achieved without effective socialization, since few employees perform their tasks independent of the organizational milieu of norms, values, relationships, and culture. HRD needs to take a more comprehensive approach to new-employee development by integrating the socialization and training perspectives, both conceptually and in practice. While there have been a few reports in the HRD literature of successful interventions (Leibowitz, Schlossberg, and Shore, 1991), socialization remains largely ignored. Mentoring programs are one tool for socialization, but they need to be planned within a socialization framework. By focusing on task training and orientation, new-employee development programs and processes are ignoring a vital component of creating and retaining outstanding employees in the long run.

The importance of the organizational entry process cannot be underestimated, and it is clear that there are real performance issues to be addressed. Turnover studies have reported unusually high turnover for new employees, usually around 50 percent (Leibowitz, Schlossberg, and Shore, 1991; Wanous, 1980). Job satisfaction studies have shown lower satisfaction among new employees (Adler and Aranya, 1984; Morrow and McElroy, 1987) and higher satisfaction when the socialization process leads to greater person-job congruence (Richards, 1984a; Stumpf and Hartman, 1984). Higher job satisfaction may lead to higher performance (Petty, McGee, and Cavender, 1984). Studies of organizational commitment have shown a link between organizational commitment and work experiences during organizational entry and the first year on the job (Meyer and Allen, 1988; Pierce and Dunham, 1987). Commitment has been shown to be linked to turnover (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino, 1979) and performance (Meyer and others, 1989). Organizational entry also has a lasting effect on a person's career (Bray, Campbell, and Grant, 1974). However, most newcomers undergo reality or culture shock because they do not understand the culture very well before joining the organization, making fit problematic (Dean, 1983; Taylor, 1988). It is not surprising that, at Texas Instruments, a new orientation program emphasizing socialization cut turnover by 40 percent, while Corning, Inc., reduced turnover 68 percent with
calculated net savings of $1.2 million annually from reduced turnover and faster learning among new employees (McGarrell, 1983).

Despite this evidence, socialization researchers have been primarily concerned about understanding and modeling the process of socialization, not on testing interventions. A variety of approaches have been considered, including models of the stages newcomers go through (Schein, 1978; Wanous, 1980), tactics and practices that organizations use (Louis, Posner, and Powell, 1983; Zahrly and Tosi, 1989), and realistic job previews (Premack and Wanous, 1985). Other researchers have approached the issue from an individual psychological perspective, including process models (Louis, 1980), investigations of personal characteristics (Jones, 1986), and surveys of tactics individuals use (Ashford, 1988; Feldman and Brett, 1983). More recently, researchers have attempted to blend the two lines of research into interactionist models (Ashford and Taylor, 1990; Jones, 1983). Unfortunately, the socialization research remains very fragmented and incomplete (Feldman, 1989; Fisher, 1986).

What is missing is the performance and intervention perspectives of HRD. HRD professionals are uniquely qualified to move socialization knowledge forward by developing high-impact performance improvement interventions. This study is a first step toward building a more comprehensive HRD model of new-employee development. It focuses on new college graduates, a group of new employees with whom HRD works extensively.

Any performance improvement process must begin with a clear description of the performance problem (Mager and Pipe, 1984). It is surprising, then, how little is known about organizational entry from a descriptive perspective. While some of the above studies on socialization and adaptation to work have used new college graduates, the objective of most has been to establish causal relationships, not to report what is actually occurring during organizational entry. Only five major studies could be located, reported in seven articles (Arnold, 1985; Gardner and Lambert, 1993; Keenan and Newton, 1986; Nicholson and Arnold, 1989, 1991; Richards, 1984a, 1984b), that report descriptive data about the new graduate's experience during the first year. Only two of these studies have been conducted in the United States, and only one of the two used a sample with broad generalizability. Thus, it is difficult to know exactly what is occurring in the field.

Before performance-based models can be developed, there needs to be a clear descriptive foundation of what new employees, and college graduates in particular, experience as they enter organizations. The purpose of this study is to provide just such a descriptive foundation. Specifically, four research questions were explored:

1. How do new graduates perceive the organizational entry experience?
2. What are new graduates' attitudes toward their new organizations?
3. To what extent are new graduates' expectations about aspects of their jobs and organizations met or not met?
4. To what extent do new graduates use recommended tactics and strategies in adapting to organizations and coping with the transition?

**Descriptive Research**

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive studies mentioned above and shows that three of the five studies were done in the United Kingdom, with one of those being done in a single company. Since socialization involves adapting to organizational cultures, which can vary considerably between countries and companies, one has to be careful in generalizing from these studies; the typical U.K. organizational culture may be quite different from the typical culture found in the United States. Of the two studies conducted in the United States, one used only liberal arts graduates in the sample and focused more on career aspirations and fit as they related to college major than on socialization variables. Thus, only one study (Gardner and Lambert, 1993) contained a broad mix of graduates and focused on socialization in the United States.

In that study, graduates reported considerable differences between their expectations prior to graduation and their experiences on the job, even after two years. Respondents reported being less challenged, using fewer skills, having less autonomy, and receiving less feedback than expected. At least half of the respondents considered themselves to have low socialization on five scales: organizational politics, organizational goals, interpersonal relations, performance expectations, and cultural language.

In the other U.S. study, Richards (1984a, 1984b) studied liberal arts graduates one and three years after graduation. Her primary interest was to see if occupational outcomes could be predicted from certain characteristics of graduates. In one article she reported that many graduates reported low job fit, indicating underemployment or employment out of their field, particularly for humanities graduates. In another article, she reported that job fit was strongly associated with work role satisfaction, as were income and job stability.

Turning to the British studies, Keenan and Newton (1986) examined the work needs of engineering graduates and found a large discrepancy between their experiences on the job and their aspirations. Nicholson and Arnold's work with graduates employed by British Petroleum (1989, 1991) also confirms the “disappointed-graduate phenomenon,” finding again that graduates' expectations were not met at the beginning of their careers, particularly in the areas of level of responsibility and use of skills. There was evidence of growing realism as time went by. In Arnold's earlier study (1985), graduates expressed a great deal of surprise at many dimensions of the job, indicating an unrealistic view of work.

Several conclusions can be reached. First, there has been a great deal of emphasis on expectations but little information on the socialization process itself. Second, more U.S. data are needed—that can be generalized to a broader population.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Time After Graduation</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
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<td>New graduates—mixed majors</td>
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<td>6 months and 1 year</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Expectations, organizational politics and goals, interpersonal relationships, performance, language</td>
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<td>Keenan and Newton (1986)</td>
<td>Engineering graduates from six universities</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>U.K.</td>
<td>Expectations, work aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richards (1984a, 1984b)</td>
<td>Liberal arts graduates</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>1 and 3 years</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Work role satisfaction, career outcomes</td>
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</table>
Method

This study describes the sample for the study and the extensive instrument development process.

**Sample.** A survey instrument was sent to 2,214 spring 1990 bachelor's degree graduates from a major land grant university in the mid-Atlantic area, representing all of the graduating class for whom good addresses could be obtained. Graduates were surveyed twelve months after they had graduated. Two mailings were completed, yielding 846 responses, for a response rate of 38.2 percent.

Two questionnaire items were used to further reduce the sample size used. First, only those who indicated that they were in a position appropriate for starting their career (that is, not in temporary employment or going to graduate school) were included in this study. Other responses would contaminate the data because these graduates are likely to have very different sentiments about the transition to work. Of 846 total respondents, 548, or 65.3 percent of the respondents, met this criterion. Then, only those indicating that they were employed in a business, professional service, or other for-profit organization were used. Those employed in educational, governmental, nonprofit, military, or other organizations were excluded because sample sizes in these categories were considerably smaller, and these types of organizations have unique characteristics that make comparisons difficult. Of the 548 respondents with the appropriate employment status, 378, or 69.0 percent, met this criterion.

Thus, the final sample used in this study was composed of 378 bachelor's degree graduates who were employed in a business, professional service, or other for-profit organization in a position appropriate for starting their careers. The sample included a very broad cross-section of graduates from many different fields, working for a wide variety of employers.

**Instrument Development.** No published instruments could be located that measured newcomers' perceptions of the socialization process, so a seven-page instrument was custom-designed for this study. Items were developed or selected from three sources: (1) content analysis of 125 interviews with new employees (one year's experience or less), direct supervisors of employees, and senior executives from twelve organizations hiring significant numbers of new employees; (2) the socialization literature; and (3) existing measurement scales. Organizations participating in the interviews were selected to provide a cross-section of industries and included a major regional bank and two state banks; two leading consumer product companies; a major management consulting firm; a large chemical firm and a large petrochemical firm; a regional telephone company; two major computer firms; and a regional retailer. Some interviews were conducted by telephone if it was not practical to visit the site. Group interviews were conducted with new employees, while individual interviews were used with managers and executives.
Because the interviews were exploratory, participants were asked broad, open-ended questions. The questions focused on five key areas for both managers and new employees: (1) description of their experiences during the first year of employment, (2) their affective responses during the first year, (3) issues and problems they felt needed to be addressed, (4) organizational processes and strategies used or encountered during socialization, and (5) recommended strategies for new employees to be successful during socialization. The interviews were transcribed and content-analyzed, using existing models of the newcomer socialization process, to identify possible constructs and items for inclusion in this instrument.

These constructs were combined with others identified from an extensive review of the literature, including those studies in which instrument items were reported. With the exception of new-employee attitudes, no suitable scales were known to exist for most constructs, so new items were constructed, which will be discussed below. In a few instances selected items from existing scales were used instead of the complete scales. Established scales known to be reliable were used for all but one of the new-employee attitudes. All items other than demographic items used a five-point Likert scale.

As a final check of the instrument's content validity, it was pilot-tested with fourteen new graduates from three organizations that were not part of the original interviews. Each person completed the instrument and was interviewed afterward. Only minor modifications were necessary and no additional items were added.

Exploratory principal-components factor analysis (varimax rotation) was used on each section of the questionnaire except new-employee attitudes. No factor analysis was necessary for the section on new-employee attitudes since established scales were used. Twenty-four factors were identified with eigenvalues greater than or equal to 1 and with factor loads of .5 or greater. Due to space limitations, the factor loadings are not reported here but will be sent on request. Almost all factors are characterized by highly interpretable simple structures with exceptionally clean loadings. Item scores in these factors were averaged to create the scale scores reported in this study along with results from the seven attitude scales. Thus, a total of thirty-one scales are reported.

Organizational Entry Experiences. Three sections of the questionnaire addressed this question. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are reported in the Results section. First, twenty-three original items were constructed to consider aspects of the entry process itself—that is, the degree to which graduates found their new organizations receptive to them, the difficulty and stress they experienced during the transition, and their overall satisfaction with the outcome of their transition to work. Second, nineteen items were employed to tap various job characteristic constructs identified in the literature (Ashford and Cummings, 1985; Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Hall and Lawler, 1970; Rabinowitz and Hall, 1981; Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman, 1970).
Complete adoption of existing instruments was not possible because not all items were appropriate for new college hires. Five items were adapted from Hall and Lawler (1970) to tap perceived job challenge, fit, and discretion. Four role ambiguity items were adapted from Ashford and Cummings (1985), as were single items tapping perceptions of feedback and clarity of job competency requirements. Use of construct definitions found in the literature combined with interview content analysis suggested seven additional original items. Third, thirteen original items asked the respondents to consider their understanding of the organization—for example, the extent to which they knew how to be effective in the organization and their understanding of the organization's culture.

**New-Employee Attitudes.** Seven job attitudes were identified from the interviews and the socialization literature as being important outcomes of the socialization process. All are commonly used in socialization research (Fisher, 1982). Because reliable scales were known to exist, this is the only section of the questionnaire that is composed almost entirely of existing scales. All scales except postdecision dissonance (the new scale in this section) were initially chosen because of their high reliabilities reported in the literature. Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) calculated from data in this study are shown in parentheses below for each scale. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The attitudes measured were:

*Job Satisfaction* ($\alpha = .85$). Because of the scope and exploratory nature of this study, it was decided to limit the investigation of job satisfaction to overall satisfaction, which has consistently shown a strong negative correlation with turnover (Mobley, 1982). The three-item short form of Hackman and Oldham's five-item Job Diagnostic Survey general satisfaction scale (1975) was used here.

*Commitment* ($\alpha = .91$). One of the most frequently used and tested measures of commitment is the fifteen-item Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, with reported internal reliabilities ranging from .82 to .93 (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979). The nine-item short form used here consists of only the positively worded items, which has been shown to have good reliability ($\alpha = .84-.90$) and to be an acceptable substitute where questionnaire length is a consideration (Mowday, Steers, and Porter, 1979).

*Internal Work Motivation* ($\alpha = .78$). A three-item scale developed by Hackman and Lawler (1971) was used to assess the extent to which the job taps the employee's intrinsic motivation.

*Job Involvement* ($\alpha = .78$). Following Ashford and Cummings (1985), a four-item version ($\alpha = .69$) of Lodahl and Kejner's twenty-item Job Involvement Scale (1965) was used.

*Intent to Quit* ($\alpha = .91$). A person's intention to quit or stay is considered to be a good predictor of turnover (Mobley, 1982). A three-item scale was used because the withdrawal decision is viewed as a multistage process (Blau, 1988; Mobley, 1977).
Psychological Success ($\alpha = .79$). Psychological success is a measure of the degree to which a person feels successful on the job (Hall, Goodale, Rabinowitz, and Morgan, 1978; Hall and Foster, 1977) and has been shown to be significantly correlated to job change and job involvement at early career stages. A six-item scale ($\alpha = .63$) used in those studies was used here.

Postdecision Dissonance ($\alpha = .87$). Because there is evidence that college students do not view their decision to join an organization as positively after joining as they did before joining, it was of interest to examine how graduates viewed their decision to join their organization. Borrowing from Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979), two items were used (no reliabilities were reported).

New-Employee Expectations. Thirty-four items were developed representing areas in which new graduates typically find some difference between what they expected prior to employment and what they actually experienced (Arnold, 1985). Examples include the realities of organizational and work life, organizational structure and practices, stress from the job, rewards from work, ability to handle the demands of the job, and expectations about co-workers. Because both positive and negative surprises require adjustment for the new employee (Nicholson and West, 1988), expectations were measured using a five-point scale ranging from "considerably worse than expected" to "considerably better than expected." Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are reported in the Results section.

Individual Adaptation Strategies. Twenty-one original items were developed to assess the frequency with which commonly suggested adaptation strategies were used. Examples include seeking feedback, acquiring a mentor, building relationships, and managing impressions. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "very often." Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) are reported in the Results section.

Results

This section reports results for all respondents as well as comparisons between various subgroups.

Demographic Profile. The average age for the sample was 23.25 years. The sample was weighted somewhat toward males (57.1 percent) and overwhelmingly toward whites (94.4 percent). Their undergraduate degrees were primarily in business (36.8 percent), engineering (25.7 percent), or arts and sciences (23.0 percent). While their academic standings varied, 40.7 percent of the sample had a grade-point average (GPA) greater than or equal to 3.0, indicating that the sample was somewhat biased toward those with higher GPAs. Approximately two-thirds of the sample reported being in a position that was both appropriate for starting their career and about what they expected, while the other third were not in a position they expected to have, even though it was an appropriate one for starting their careers. This suggests that many graduates were achieving their employment goals but it also suggests that a signif-
icant group number were not achieving their goals. Additionally, the sample was slightly weighted toward large companies, with 57.5 percent working in organizations with more than 1,000 employees and 42.9 percent working in organizations with more than 5,000 employees. Respondents reported having an average of slightly less than six months of what they considered to be professional-level work experience prior to graduation.

Respondents had worked for an average of 1.37 organizations (not parts of an organization) despite being out of college for only one year, indicating a moderate level of job changing. Closer examination of the job changers (those who had worked for more than one organization since graduation) showed that they had worked for an average of 2.4 organizations \((n = 100\) or 26.4 percent of the sample). Comparing the demographics of the job changers to those of the graduates who did not change, 54 percent were female versus only 38.6 percent of the nonchangers \((X^2 = 7.46, p < .05)\); 70 percent had a GPA lower than 3.0 versus 45 percent for nonchangers \((X^2 = 7.38, p < .05)\); and 49.0 percent reported being in a position that was both appropriate for starting their careers and what they had anticipated versus 72.7 percent for nonchangers \((X^2 = 18.75, p < .01)\).

**Research Question 1: Organizational Entry Experiences.** Table 2 reports the twelve factors identified in the three questionnaire sections addressing this question along with the number of items, reliabilities, means, and standard deviations for each scale. Nunnally (1978) suggests an internal consistency reliability of at least .60 for instruments in their early stages of development. Eight of the twelve scales met this criterion with an average alpha equal to .71. The Adaptation Difficulty \((\alpha = .57)\) and Stress \((\alpha = .54)\) scales had marginal levels of reliability but were close to the .60 level. Two scales, Mutual Influence \((\alpha = .42)\) and Informal Organization \((\alpha = .26)\) displayed unacceptable levels of reliability.

At first glance it would appear that organizational entry experiences were relatively positive for these people because Transition Satisfaction and Acceptance both had high means \((M = 4.05\) and \(M = 3.85, \text{ respectively})\). However, there was considerable variability around these means \((SD = 0.71\) and 0.61), indicating widely varied experiences. This is further supported by the Adaptation Difficulty and Stress measures, which are only slightly above the midpoint \((M = 3.34\) and 3.24, respectively), indicating some difficulty with the transition. The higher standard deviations for Adaptation Difficulty and Stress indicate more variation among respondents, which is supported by an examination of the item frequencies. While some respondents appear to have been relatively satisfied with the overall transition, the variability around the means indicates widely varied experiences and mixed opinions. Apparently the transition was not without difficulty.

Respondents' perceptions of job characteristics were similarly mixed. The means indicated only moderate success, ranging from 3.67 to 3.80. On average, respondents perceived only moderate Challenge in their jobs, had moderate Clarity about their jobs and Control over them, and reported only a mod-
CoIIeee Graduates' Exveriences and Attitudes

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Organizational Entry Experiences, First Job Perceptions, and Organizational Understanding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>M*</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3.47</td>
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<td>Adaptation Difficulty</td>
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<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition Satisfaction</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Job Perceptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
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<td>Clarity</td>
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<td>Control</td>
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<td>Mutual Influence</td>
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<td>Organizational Savvy</td>
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<td>Culture Understanding</td>
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<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal Organization</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

erate degree of Mutual Influence. Once again there was considerable variability about the means (SD = 0.56–0.80), indicating widely mixed experiences.

Looking at respondents' understanding of their organizations, Culture Understanding was weak (M = 3.32) and its standard deviation was high, indicating that they did not believe they had been very successful at understanding the culture of their organizations. Both the Organizational Savvy and Informal Organization means were relatively high (3.99 and 3.91, respectively), indicating that respondents believed that they had a strong understanding of how to be effective in their organizations and of the informal organization.

Research Question 2: New-Employee Attitudes. This section was not factor-analyzed because all the scales except postdecision dissonance were existing scales with high reliability. Reliabilities in this study were high on all scales (α = .78–.91) and generally higher than those reported in other studies. Table 3 summarizes means and standard deviations for these scales. Responses indicated limited success by organizations in fostering important job attitudes. Respondents were just above the midpoint for Job Satisfaction and Commitment (M = 3.61 and 3.41, respectively). The standard deviation for both scales was relatively high (SD = 1.02 and 0.82, respectively), particularly for Job Satisfaction, indicating wide variability in satisfaction and commitment. Internal Work Motivation was particularly high for this sample (M = 4.20), while the Postdecision Dissonance mean was particularly low (M = 2.05). However, the latter must be viewed with caution since the standard deviation for Postdecision Dissonance was high (SD = 0.99). Psychological Success was moderately
high (M = 3.76), indicating that respondents felt fairly successful in their work. Particularly interesting is the low score on Job Involvement (M = 2.41), indicating that, while the respondents are generally motivated, they do not live for their jobs but rather seek to balance them with their personal lives.

Important to most organizations would be the low score on Intent to Quit (M = 2.58), indicating that, on average, most somewhat disagreed that they would be seeking new positions. However, the standard deviation was very high (SD = 1.25). Closer inspection of the item frequencies shows that while 50 to 60 percent of the respondents did not intend to quit, there was a large group who were either ambivalent or intended to quit, which could be quite costly to the organization.

**Research Question 3: New-Employee Expectations.** Six factors were identified for this research question (see Table 3). Reliabilities for three of the scales that had more than two items were good (α = .67-.91), but reliabilities for the other three were marginal (α = .47-.56).

On the average, most graduates found these aspects of the job about as they expected, with all means approximately equal to 3.0. The standard devi-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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*a1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

*b1 = considerably worse than expected, 2 = somewhat worse than expected, 3 = about as expected, 4 = somewhat better than expected, 5 = considerably better than expected.

*c1 = never, 2 = once or twice, 3 = several times, 4 = often, 5 = very often.
ations show that there was considerable variability in the responses (SD = 0.63–0.82). For many of the individual items, 20 to 40 percent of the responses were in the “considerably worse than expected” or “somewhat worse than expected” range, indicating that a significant number of new employees had some degree of disappointment.

**Research Question 4: Individual Adaptation Strategies.** Factor analysis resulted in six adaptation strategy factors (see Table 3). Reliabilities for all scales were good (α = .65–.89). Overall, use of these strategies appeared limited. Except for Information Seeking and Relationship Building, the means were clustered around 3.0, which was defined as “several times.” Information Seeking was the highest (M = 3.87), while Relationship Building was only moderately high (M = 3.53). Feedback Seeking had the lowest mean (M = 2.77). Overall, these means indicate that respondents made only modest attempts at using these adaptation strategies, which have been suggested in the literature as being useful. Furthermore, all of the standard deviations were high (0.72–1.21), indicating wide variability in the use of these strategies. Particularly noteworthy was the high variability on the Support Seeking (SD = 1.21) and Balancing (SD = 1.05) scales.

**Analysis of Demographic and Background Variables.** The data were further analyzed by demographic and background variables to determine if there were any differences between groups (see Table 4). A one-way analysis of variance was used for the categorical variables, while correlation analysis was used for interval variables. Post hoc analysis (Tukey’s) was used where appropriate to further analyze the differences. The shaded areas in the table identify the groups where the analysis of variance results indicated a significant (p ≤ .05) between-group difference.

**Sex.** While four socialization scales were found to have significant differences between males and females, only Support Seeking appeared meaningful. Females reported substantially higher support seeking (M = 3.58) than males (M = 2.86).

**Race.** No differences were meaningful since the sample was predominantly white.

**Grade Point Average.** Significant differences were found on four scales: Challenge, Clarity, Informal Organization, and Intent to Quit. Post hoc analysis revealed that respondents with GPAs in the 3.0 to 3.49 range reported significantly higher job Challenge than those with lower GPAs (M = 3.86 versus M = 3.60 and M = 3.51) and lower Intent to Quit than those with GPAs between 2.5 and 2.99 (M = 2.32 versus M = 2.72). Respondents with the highest GPAs (3.5–4.0) reported significantly lower job Clarity than those with the lowest GPAs (M = 3.61 versus M = 3.95). Differences on the Informal Organization scale are suspect since that scale’s reliability is very low.

**Size of Organization.** Significant differences were found on five scales: Control, Intent to Quit, Organizational Expectations, Reward Expectations, and Relationship Building. Post hoc analysis revealed that the respondents
### Table 4. Means by Selected Demographic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Sex</th>
<th>GPA</th>
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**Notes:**
- GPA: Grade Point Average
- Size of Organization: Number of Employees
- Undergraduate College: Business, Engineering, Arts & Sciences
who were employed in the smallest organizations had their reward expecta-
tions met significantly less than those at the largest organizations (M = 2.70
versus M = 3.01). In addition, the same group reported significantly less Rela-
tionship Building than those in the largest organizations (M = 3.34 versus
M = 3.66). Those employed in the largest organizations reported the lowest in-
tent to Quit (M = 2.36), which was significantly different from the mean for
those employed in organizations with 1,001–5,000 employees (M = 2.95). Fi-
ally, respondents employed in organizations with 501–1,000 employees felt
significantly more Control over their jobs (M = 4.03) than those employed in
organizations with 1,001–5,000 employees (M = 3.64).

**Undergraduate College.** Three scales were found to have a significant dif-
ference by undergraduate college. Post hoc analysis showed that the differ-
ences were primarily due to business graduates’ reporting significantly more
Stress and Support Seeking and slightly more Relationship Building than
engineers.

Correlations between each socialization scale and the interval demo-
graphic variables—age, months employed, number of organizations worked
for, number of positions held, and months of previous professional work ex-
perience—were also examined. Only 9 of 165 possible correlations (5.4 per-
cent) were statistically significant but none were large enough to be meaning-
ful and they may have been significant by chance.

**Discussion**

This study helps fill a gap in HRD research by describing various aspects of
new college graduates’ organizational entry. Its most important contribution is
that it presents a comprehensive picture of organizational entry across a broad
cross-section of for-profit organizations and work environments as seen from
the new graduates’ perspective. It provides a clearer description of the perform-
ance issues upon which HRD should focus. The wide variation in the re-
sponses and the number of potential problems identified in this broad sample
reinforce the notion that organizational entry is an underemphasized career
transition that deserves reexamination by HRD.

The picture presented here is one of widely varied and mixed experiences,
which is consistent with earlier studies. Generally, it appears that the process
was a positive and productive one for some graduates while others found it to
be difficult, stressful, and less successful than would be desirable. Organiza-
tions should be concerned about the job attitudes of this sample, since they
suggest potential problems. These problems are consistent with studies cited
earlier that show limited success in building job satisfaction and commitment
and preventing turnover among new college graduates. These are costly organ-
izational problems that often stay hidden from routine cost control measures.
The results indicate the need for HRD interventions and the likelihood of high
payoffs from them.
These data point out the danger of relying on mean scores when examining human resource problems. In many cases, closer examination of the standard deviations and means underlying the scales usually revealed a significant group of respondents who did not report favorable results. This “significant minority” problem is important because even a minority of newcomers in an organization who have problems may warrant an intervention. Small groups of new employees with problems can cost an organization enormous amounts of money in turnover or lost productivity and can create significant human resource problems. Examining the means alone averages out problems that in reality cannot be ignored. For example, approximately 33 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they expected to begin searching for another job in the next year and another 15 percent were ambivalent about that item. Thus, these organizations were in danger of losing half of these new employees, yet the mean response on this scale was 2.58, indicating low Intent to Quit overall. While some turnover is to be expected as new graduates search for the best career match, it is also expensive for organizations and should generally be minimized in new employees.

Some of the more positive results need to be examined carefully, since they may actually be representative of the newcomers’ naiveté, not their success. That is, respondents may believe that they are relatively successful in the transition but their employers may not agree. One of the key problems reported by organizations in interviews is that new college graduates “don’t know what they don’t know.” It is possible, then, that these data may be more representative of ignorance than of success. New employees may not know how to collect or interpret feedback from the organization well enough to know that they aren’t as successful as they feel. Field reports (Holton, 1991) indicate that this is a significant problem, and great effort is often required to convince new graduates that they have a lot to learn and are not as successful as they believe. Further research that compares new employees’ perceptions to the organization’s is needed to clarify this issue.

Somewhat surprisingly, the results indicated that, on average, the respondents’ experience was about what they expected. These respondents would appear to have had less reality shock and less stress from unmet expectations than reported in studies cited earlier. However, high variability around the means (SD = 0.70–0.80) is indicative of lingering problems in this area. Inspection of the item frequencies also reveals that a significant minority group (20–45 percent) in most scales found their experience somewhat or considerably worse than expected.

It is possible that these results reflect what Louis (1980, 1985) calls sense making. That is, these respondents had been on the job an average of over ten months, which may have been enough time for them to “make sense of” and come to grips with any discrepancy they experienced. If they have accepted and “made sense of” the discrepancy, it would be very difficult for them to recall their feelings in the early months. That there was still a large minority
whose expectations had not been met is another clue that the results might be different if the study had been done earlier in their first year on the job.

An alarming picture emerged from the investigation of individual adaptation strategies that are used, although it is quite consistent with field observations. Individuals were not using many deliberate strategies to adapt to their organizations, indicating enormous ignorance of the importance of the transition to work. This is particularly troubling since recent studies suggest that it is important for new employees to be more proactive during the socialization process (Ashford and Cummings, 1985; Morrison and Bies, 1991). The low frequency with which new employees used Relationship Building is particularly noticeable because it is an important strategy for learning an organization's culture and informal systems. This reinforces the notion that more interventions are needed in organizations and universities to teach organizational entry skills and strategies.

The results suggest that a continued focus on task training and orientation is inadequate to meet the challenges of new-employee development. HRD must embrace integration of both the training and socialization perspectives into a comprehensive new-employee development model. Such an integration presents an exciting agenda for new HRD research. Key items on the agenda include developing performance-based intervention models, investigating socialization-related learning, developing instruments to diagnose adaptation problems, designing interventions to facilitate the process, testing alternative development strategies, evaluating intervention outcomes, and establishing the return on investment of interventions. Because socialization is a process, not a program, it will require the development of structured on-the-job development strategies as well as training interventions. It is also imperative that management development models be extended to include new-employee development skills, because management plays a key role in socialization.

While this study has focused on new college graduates, it is important to realize that socialization is an issue for all new employees, regardless of their experience or educational level. There are clearly differences between experienced and inexperienced employees during the entry process, but socialization research cited earlier shows that the process is basically the same. Thus, there is reason to believe that general models can be developed to fit both groups.

This study also has important implications for academic programs preparing HRD practitioners. First, programs should include training in the professional skills necessary to adapt to an organization. Second, the classes should be structured more like the "real world" to condition students to the expectations and cultures in which they will work after graduation. While this is not a popular change with students, it is a necessary one. Third, emphasis must be placed on providing field experiences for students. Fourth, academics must hold themselves accountable for successful organizational entry, not just job placement.
This study also suggests that HRD professionals, college recruiters, human resource directors, line managers, and other practitioners need to give organizational entry a high priority. Effective management of the new-employee development process is a powerful strategic tool that is underemphasized. Interventions will have to be year-long processes that combine the efforts of HRD, managers, mentors, and co-workers. Training programs alone will not be sufficient, though they will likely be part of any intervention. The job attitudes reported here suggest that HRD has an opportunity to enhance the productivity of new college graduates and make a substantial impact on the organization's bottom line if a more comprehensive model is developed.

References


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