

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION, ROLE AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE: A PATH ANALYTICAL STUDY

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OPSOMMING

In 'n poging om uitstaande diens te lewer, behoort bestuurders 'n behoefte aan beter diensstrategie te ontwikkel, wat *inter-alia* behoort in te sluit: metodes om die dienswerknemer, die sleutelpersoon in die dienssituasie, te bestuur. 'n Ondersoek van 106 bankwerknemers dui daarop dat formele sosialisering daartoe lei dat genoemde werknemers die organisasionele klimaat as bydraend tot uitstaande kliëntdiens ervaar. Dienswerkers wat formeel socialiseer ervaar ook minder rolverwarring en rolkonflik. Rolkonflik en rolverwarring deur dienswerkers ervaar, affekteer skynbaar nie hul persepsie van organisasionele klimaat nie. Die implikasie van die bevindings vir bestuur word ook gerapporteer.

ABSTRACT

In an effort to offer excellent service, managers need to develop better service strategies, which should include *inter-alia*, improved methods of managing the key actor in the service encounter, namely, the service employee. From a survey of 106 bank employees, it was ascertained that formal socialization would result in the employees perceiving the organizational climate as being supportive of excellent customer service. Furthermore, service employees who are formally socialized by the service organization would experience less role ambiguity and role conflict. However, the role conflict and ambiguity experienced by the service employees did not seem to affect their perception of the organizational climate. The implications of the findings for management are also reported.

Every organization has its own unique traditions, culture and ways of getting things done. This includes how customers are treated. Situations may vary from organization to organization; however, there are some common and identifiable features of organizational environments that serve to support quality customer service. Schneider, Gunnarson and Niles-Jolley (1994) have argued that critical elements of the organizational climate are the individuals' perceptions of the organization, and these perceptions govern the employees' behaviour.

Unlike the earth's atmosphere, the atmosphere within a work environment can be controlled. It can be made better, or worse by the actions of its leaders as well as employees. In view of the aforementioned, this paper reports the results of research which examined the effects of formal and informal socialization tactics on the service employee's perception of their role, as well as the organizational climate.

Since the terms culture and climate are sometimes confused, the author will firstly examine these two concepts briefly, and thereafter, from a discussion of the relevant variables, formulate a number of hypotheses.

Organizational Culture-Organizational Climate

Although Schneider and Bowen (1995) use the terms "culture" and "climate" interchangeably, other researchers (cf. Brown, 1995; Mc Nabb and Sepic, 1994) emphasize that there are certain differences between these concepts. Brown (1995) is of the opinion that climate is a relatively enduring quality of an organization that is "experienced by employees and influences their behaviour."

The organizational climate is concerned with how employee's perceive the characteristics of an organization's culture. In contrast to culture which sets the boundaries of behaviour, climate directly influences behaviour within the organization and with the organizations external customers. Climate deals with organizational characteristics which are perceived by the individuals; anything in the organization which members interpret or attach meaning to in their attempt to make sense of the organizational environment. The study of culture entails a study of meaning of events in organizations. The latter is difficult to measure. Furthermore, Lim (1995: 19) asserts that questionnaires are more useful to measure organizational climate rather than organizational culture. In view of this, the

researcher examines the effects of two socialization tactics on the employees' perception of the organizational climate.

Organizational Socialization-Organizational Climate

Service organization employees have face-to-face contact with customers and this type of work seems to result in increased stress and strain, because employees try to meet conflicting demands from management and customers. Management can potentially manage employee stress by establishing a climate in which the employee's desires to give good service are made easier and encouraged.

Jones (1986) asserts that perceptions of the organizational climate are a result of organizational socialization. Organizational is the process by which employees learn, appreciate, and internalize an organization's goals, values, social knowledge, and expected behaviours (Wagner and Hollenbeck, 1996). As such socialization focuses on how individuals learn the beliefs, values, orientations, behaviours, skills and so forth necessary to fulfill their new roles and function effectively within an organization's milieu.

In formal socialization, (new) employees are separated from others while they learn about the organization and their tasks (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). During informal socialization, (new) employees interact with more experienced employees, become integrated into their work groups, and learn on the job, whereas in formal socialization the employees see and learn what the organization wants them to learn.

Ashforth and Saks (1996) assert that despite the cogency of this typology, research on socialization tactics has been relatively scarce. In order to address the aforementioned, it is hypothesized that:

- H1: Formal organizational socialization [FS] of service employees is positively associated with the organizational climate [OC] for service as perceived by the employees.
- H2: Informal organizational socialization [IS] of service employees is negatively associated with the organizational climate for service as perceived by the employees.

Organizational Socialization – Role Perceptions

It is well documented that service employees are susceptible to role conflict because they occupy a position at the boundary between the firm and the customer. Service employees must try

to satisfy the often inconsistent demands of people in two independent organizations, namely management and customers. Researchers such as Michaels and Dixon (1994) assert that when an individual has gained an appropriate understanding of his or her role and the roles of the other members of the role set, it is possible to formulate accurate role expectations. Furthermore, the formulation of accurate role expectations should result in superior quality for the service encounter.

Some researchers such as Starr and Fondas (1992) and Wagner and Hollenbeck, (1996) argue that socialization tactics influence the role orientations that newcomers ultimately adopt. These researchers concur that in order for service employees and service customers to learn their roles, and to be able to form accurate role expectations for the service encounter, they must be socialized into the organization. Black (1992) determined that collective socialization tactics were positively related to role innovation, and that serial and fixed socialization tactics were negatively related to role innovation.

In view of the need to better understand the effects of different socialization tactics on the service employee's role perception, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H3: Formal organizational socialization of the service employees is negatively associated with the role ambiguity [RA] experienced by the employees.
- H4: Informal organizational socialization of the service employees is positively associated with role ambiguity experienced by the employees.
- H5: Formal organizational socialization of the service employees is negatively associated with the role conflict [RC] experienced by the employees.
- H6: Informal organizational socialization of the service employees is positively associated with the role conflict experienced by the employees.

Organizational Climate and Role Perception

Role ambiguity is a situation that arises when the employee's work role, that is, the scope and responsibility of the job and what others expect of him or her, is poorly structured and ill-defined. This occurs when a person is not sure exactly what to do in executing job related activities. Role ambiguity may prohibit an individual from experiencing a sense of accomplishment, because the individual is unclear about what ought to be accomplished.

Some researchers such as Dubinsky and Mattson (1979) assert that role ambiguity has a negative impact on job outcomes. Incongruence between the service orientation of employees and perceived orientation of management engenders role ambiguity and conflict. Schneider (1980) asserts that if the structure of the service script is better understood, the transaction can be engineered for congruency, and there is a greater probability that a climate for service will prevail. In order to shed more light on the relationship between the organizational climate and role, it is hypothesized that:

- H7: The organizational climate for service as perceived by the service employees is negatively associated with the role ambiguity experienced by the employees.
- H8: The organizational climate for service as perceived by the service employees is negatively associated with the role conflict experienced by the employees.

Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict

Boshoff and Mels (1995: 33) assert that role conflict and role ambiguity are positively correlated. In order to explore this relationship further, it is hypothesized that:

- H9: The role ambiguity [RA] experienced by the service employee is positively associated with the role conflict [RC] experienced by the employee.

To test the hypotheses, research was undertaken to compile and validate a questionnaire to measure formal and informal

organizational socialization, role ambiguity and role conflict, and the organizational climate for service, and to fit the theoretical model to the data in order to permit statistical inferences.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The survey method was employed to obtain data by means of self administered questionnaires, from a random sample of 200 front-line employees of three major commercial banks in South Africa. Branch managers were requested to distribute the questionnaires during regular staff meetings, after being briefed about the research. A covering letter explaining the purpose of the research, together with self addressed, stamped envelopes was provided. The response rate was 50,47 per cent.

Measuring Instruments

The type of organizational socialization was measured with a 5 point Likert scale with anchors of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree (neutral), (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. The questions were adapted from the questionnaire developed by Jones (1986). Of the 15 questions, six were intended to measure 'informal' socialization.

To measure the perception of the organizational climate, a 22-item, five point Likert scale with anchors of (5) strongly agree and (1) strongly disagree was developed, based upon an adaptation of Schneider and Bowen's (1995) and Kelley's (1987) scale.

The conflict and ambiguity scales developed by Chonko, Howell, and Bellenger (1986) were adapted for this research. In order to ascertain information about role conflict, employees were asked to indicate the agreement between themselves and their jobs, supervisors, and customers with reference to seven items, on a 5 point scale ranging from 1 (no agreement) to 5 (complete agreement).

Reliability of Measures

By using the computer programme SAS PROC.CORR (SAS Institute, 1990), Stepwise Reliability Analysis (Wille, 1996) was performed on the various measuring instruments included in the employee questionnaire.

The resulting final Cronbach's coefficient alphas which all fell in an acceptable range of reliability are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1
CRONBACH'S ALPHA COEFFICIENT

INSTRUMENT	COEFFICIENT
Formal Socialization	0,793
Role Ambiguity	0,849
Role Conflict	0,794
Organizational Climate	0,915

Validity of Measures

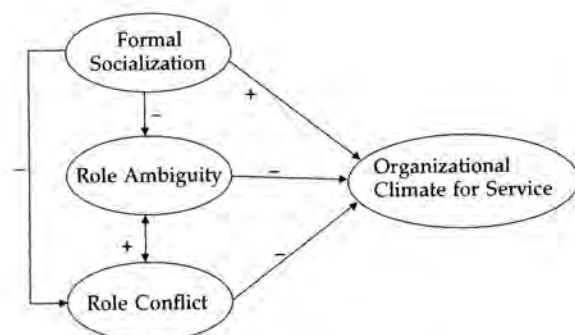
To assess the discriminant and construct validity of the empirical measuring instruments, they were subjected to Stepwise Exploratory Factor Analysis (Wille, 1996). Table 2 shows that the measuring instruments possess acceptable levels of discriminant and construct validity since they loaded above 0.4 only on one factor (Rummel, 1967).

In terms of the latent variables and the empirical factor structure, the causal model is depicted in Figure 1. The latent variable, "Informal Socialization" was removed from the hypothesized research model because it yielded a Cronbach's co-efficient alpha of 0.6, which did not meet Nunnally's (1971) standards. Thus hypotheses H2, H4 and H6 could not be empirically tested.

TABLE 2
ROTATED FACTOR LOADINGS

ITEMS	FACTOR 1 FORMAL SOCIALIZATION	FACTOR 2 ROLE AMBIGUITY	FACTOR 3 ROLE CONFLICT	FACTOR 4 ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE
FS1	0.125	0.708*	0.090	-0.108
FS2	-0.058	0.815*	-0.064	-0.020
FS3	0.036	0.512*	-0.049	0.250
FS4	0.023	0.582*	0.081	0.114
RA3	0.010	0.011	0.002	0.991*
RA4	0.065	0.074	0.129	0.645*
RC1	-0.027	-0.024	0.635*	0.054
RC2	-0.003	0.026	0.792*	-0.093
RC3	0.010	0.017	0.803*	0.136
OC1	0.738*	0.100	-0.099	0.031
OC2	0.836*	0.076	0.037	-0.047
OC3	0.977*	-0.052	0.67	-0.035
OC4	0.876*	-0.070	-0.049	0.080

* THE HIGHEST FACTOR LOADINGS

FIGURE 1
PROPOSED CAUSAL MODEL FITTED TO THE DATA

RESULTS

The causal model (Figure 1) was fitted to the observed data using the computer program RAMONA (Browne and Mels, 1990), by specifying an analysis based on sample correlation matrix with maximum likelihood estimation. The resulting path diagram is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows that the formal socialization experienced by the service employees exerts a significant positive influence on the employee's perception of the organizational climate (0.556; $p < 0.01$). More specifically, formal socialization of its employees by the service organization will lead to perception of a "warmer" organizational climate. This finding supports H1.

The above implies that service firm managers should ensure that their employees are formally oriented about the organization, who the customers are, and why they are important. A further implication of the above finding is that since management does not have the ability to directly control the service delivery, it has to develop indirect control by creating "atmospherics" that make employees feel that the service is the predominant norm guiding their thinking and behaviour. The manager's job will be to co-ordinate the workplace so that he/she does not have to intervene when employees encounter their customers. The appropriate behaviour will be in line with the "atmosphere" of the firm.

It is further evident that formal socialization is correlated with

the role ambiguity (0.598; $p < 0.01$) and the role conflict (0.291; $p < 0.05$) experienced by the service employees. More specifically, the better the formal socialization between the bank and its employees, the lower the level of role ambiguity and role conflict experienced by the employees and vice-versa. The aforementioned findings which are supported by previous research (cf. Hartline and Ferrel, 1993; Hartenian, Hadaway and Badovick, 1994) results in hypotheses H3 and H5 being accepted.

It is also evident that the role conflict and role ambiguity experienced by the bank customers are significantly correlated (0.504; $p < 0.01$). This finding which concurs with Boshoff and Mels (1995) lends support to hypotheses H9 and H10.

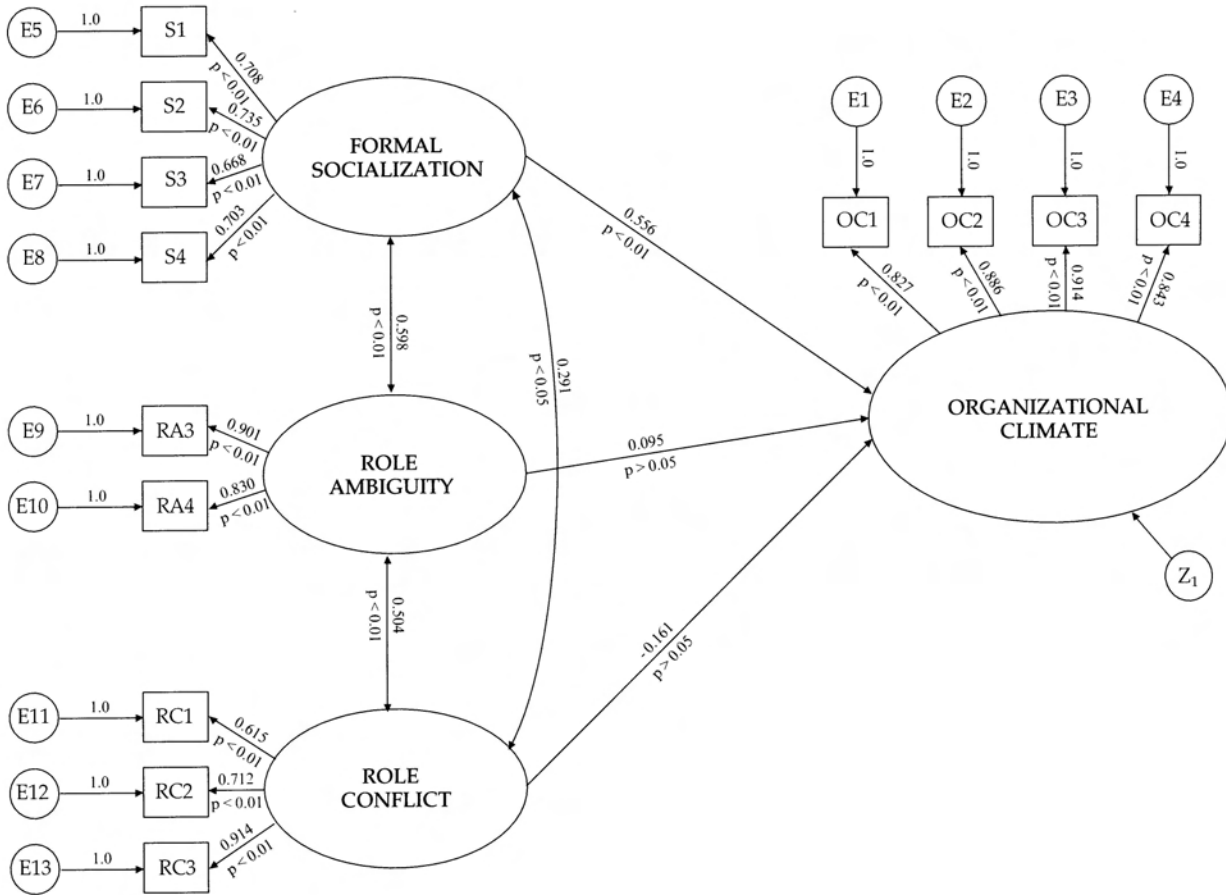
In view of the empirical support for hypotheses H3; H5; H9 and H10, it would seem that through "formal" socialization tactics, service firm managers could reduce the role ambiguity and conflict experienced by employees. Training employees apart from the on-going work may allow employees to focus on task-related knowledge and skills without interference of work activities.

Somewhat contrary to theoretical assumptions, the role ambiguity and the role conflict experienced by the service employees do not significantly influence their perception of the organizational climate. This finding does not support hypotheses H7 and H8. More specifically, this implies that irrespective of their role orientation, service employees will perceive the organizational climate clearly.

The measures of fit of the model as reflected in Figure 2 indicate that the model provides a reasonable fit (approximation) to the data since the expected cross validation index (CVI) of 2,313 is lower than the CVI for the saturated model (2,442).

DISCUSSION

Since the regulators of profit in a service business are largely those individuals that directly interface with customers and deliver the service in concert with the customer, service companies which are interested in increasing profit must practice the belief that the customer contact staff is their most important asset. An important part of practising this belief is to put in place a system to support the employees on a personal level. Such a system may be put into place by, *inter-alia*, a periodic employee attitude survey, and providing training as a



$OC1 = (OC1 + OC3 + OC4 + OC5) / 4$; $OC2 = (OC7 + OC8 + OC9 + OC10 + OC11) / 5$;
 $OC3 = (OC12 + OC13 + OC15 + OC16 + OC17) / 5$; $OC4 = (OC18 + OC19 + OC20 + OC21 + OC22) / 5$
 $S1 = (S2 + S4) / 2$; $S2 = (S5 + S7) / 2$; $S3 = (S9 + S11) / 2$; $S4 = (S12 + S13) / 2$

MEASURES OF FIT OF THE MODEL

SAMPLE DISCREPANCY FUNCTION VALUE	= 1.452
POPULATION DISCREPANCY FUNCTION VALUE BIAS ADJUSTED POINT ESTIMATE	= 0.662
90 PER CENT CONFIDENCE INTERVAL	= (0.342; 1.073)
ROOT MEAN SQUARE ERROR OF APPROXIMATION POINT ESTIMATE	= 0.099
90 PER CENT CONFIDENCE INTERVAL	= (0.071; 0.126)
EXPECTED CROSS VALIDATION INDEX POINT ESTIMATE (MODIFIED AIC)	= 2.313
90 PER CENT CONFIDENCE INTERVAL	= (1.993; 2.724)
CROSS VALIDATION (MODIFIED AIC) FOR SATURATED MODEL	= 2.442
TEST STATISTIC	= 124.90
EXCEEDANCE PROBABILITIES:-	
Ho: PERFECT FIT (RMSEA=0.0)	= 0,000
Ho: CLOSE FIT (RMSEA.LE. 0.050)	= 0.004
DEGREES OF FREEDOM	= 68

FIGURE 2
EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED CASUAL MODEL: DETERMINANTS OF EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE

means to achieve the company’s vision. In an effort to better manage the organization, service providers need to ask the following questions: How do employees see the organization? Are they clear about their role within the organization? How can the organization influence their role?

Some researchers such as Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) assert

that the socialization process begins with the recruitment and selection process. If the organization is unable to find a person with the “right” set of beliefs, assumptions and values, then it has do a lot of formal socialization. Ineffective recruitment of service oriented employees can result in employees experiencing role conflict and role ambiguity.

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

HYPOTHESES	DESCRIPTION	HYPOTHEZED INFLUENCE	ACTUAL INFLUENCE	CONCLUSION
H1	FS —> OC	POSITIVE	POSITIVE	ACCEPTED
H2	IS —> OC	NEGATIVE	XX	XX
H3	FS —> RA	NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE	ACCEPTED
H4	IS —> RA	POSITIVE	XX	XX
H5	FS —> RC	NEGATIVE	NEGATIVE	ACCEPTED
H6	IS —> RC	POSITIVE	XX	XX
H7	RC —> OC	NEGATIVE	NS	REJECTED
H8	RA —> OC	NEGATIVE	NS	REJECTED
H9	RA —> RC	POSITIVE	POSITIVE	ACCEPTED

NS: NOT SIGNIFICANT

XX: THE ASSOCIATION COULD NOT BE ASCERTAINED SINCE "INFORMAL SOCIALIZATION" WAS REMOVED FROM THE MODEL BECAUSE ITS MEASURING INSTRUMENT LACKED VALIDITY

CONCLUSIONS

Through the development and validation of research instruments to measure formal socialization, role perception and the organizational climate, this study highlighted the effects of "formal" socialization strategies on the service employees' perception of their role as well as the organizational climate for service. However, since the research instrument to measure "informal" socialization was found to be unreliable, it was not possible to test several hypotheses [See Table 3]. Attempts should be made to construct a more reliable instrument to determine the effects of informal socialization strategies on the employees' perception of their role and the organizational climate.

From a methodological point of view, the data in this study was obtained from frontline employees only. It would be interesting to include back-office staff as well as tellers so as to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Furthermore, to increase the generalizability of the findings, future research might involve the replication of this study in a variety of service settings, industries and organizations.

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