Building on the Past: Enacting Established Personal Identities in a New Work Setting

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Abstract

A qualitative, longitudinal study of two groups of experienced professionals beginning work in a research organization provided insights into how newcomers with work experience adjust to and become assimilated into new jobs and work settings. Multiple methods were used to collect data on the newcomers' work experiences before and after assuming their new jobs. Repeated interviews with them during their first six months in their new jobs revealed that their past experience affected their assimilation in three primary ways: through the personal identities they had developed and carried with them, through the know-how they had acquired in past jobs and how well it fit with their new jobs, and through the personal tactics they had learned for managing their work and managing change. In general, newcomers with diverse experience adjusted better than those with narrow experience because (1) they found it easier to enact dimensions of their personal identities that allowed them to function effectively in the new situation, (2) they more easily found a fit between know-how gleaned from that experience and their new jobs, and (3) they could draw on a wider variety of personal tactics that they had previously used to help them adjust.

(*Socialization*; *Identity*; *Experienced Workers*; *Qualitative Methods*; *Grounded Theory*)

Studies show that many U.S. workers change jobs frequently, holding an average of eight jobs during their careers (Wegmann 1991). In the organizational literature, the processes through which newcomers adjust to the expectations and demands of new jobs and settings have been studied as instances of socialization. Most of this research has focused on neophyte workers—individuals beginning their first job or entering a training program (e.g., Van Maanen 1975, Jones 1986, Morrison 1993). As a result, we know relatively little about the socialization of "veteran" workers as they progress through their careers (Saks and Ashforth 1997, p. 271).

One obvious and important difference between veteran and neophyte workers is what they bring with them from their past experience. Neophyte workers bring what they have learned through their childhood socialization and educational experiences to the jobs they assume as adults (Mortimer and Simmons 1978). Veteran workers who change jobs also bring with them a repertoire of cognitions and behaviors acquired in prior jobs (Brim 1968, p. 28). Thus, applying findings from the socialization of neophyte workers to that of veteran workers changing jobs is likely to be misleading.

The aim of the study reported here was to provide insights into the socialization of veteran workers changing jobs. To do so, we employed qualitative methods to follow two cohorts of experienced newcomers from their initial encounter with, and through their expected assimilation into, a new work setting. To allow for discovery and to strengthen understanding, we employed a variety of qualitative methods and an inductive approach. Our ultimate research aim was to develop grounded theory that explained how experienced workers' past work experience helps or hinders their adjustment to their new jobs and their assimilation within their new work settings.[1]

As is customary in grounded theory research, we used only a few central ideas and theories to inform the design and execution of our data collection (Eisenhardt 1989, Strauss and Corbin 1990). However, as our analysis of the data proceeded, we searched the literature for other research that was pertinent to theoretical issues emerging from the data. We will discuss the initial ideas and theories we brought to the research in this section and will introduce other pertinent literature as we present and discuss our findings.

Perspectives on Socialization

Although theorists have advanced somewhat different definitions of organizational socialization (Feldman 1981,

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Falcione and Wilson 1988), their definitions have an underlying similarity. In particular, socialization has been defined as a process in which newcomers to a social group or other social entity are transformed from outsiders to functioning, participating, and effective insiders of that entity (Van Maanen and Schein 1979). To become insiders, newcomers must usually learn (Schein 1968, Van Maanen 1975, Fisher 1986, Morrison 1993), acquire (Van Maanen and Schein 1979), internalize, and practice new ways of thinking and behaving (Trice and Beyer 1993). To arrive at these new ways of thinking and behaving, they must engage in sensemaking (Louis 1980); that is, they must attribute meaning to what they experience in the new work setting by placing it within a cognitive framework (Weick 1995). From this perspective, successful socialization entails some amount of change in individuals—their adjustment to the new situation. This perspective on socialization thus tends to focus on what happens to individuals being socialized. In the process, newcomers are often viewed as relatively passive recipients of a process initiated and executed by socializing agents.

A complementary perspective on socialization has focused on what the agents of organizations or other groups do to socialize newcomers and shape how they adjust. For example, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) described and classified socialization tactics that organizations use to influence how newcomers orient themselves to their new roles. In subsequent empirical research, Jones (1986) grouped these tactics into two categories—institutionalized and individualized—and found support for the proposition that different tactics produce different responses in new employees.

Although a substantial body of quantitative research on socialization has accumulated in the management field using these two perspectives, our understanding of *how and why* people change or fail to change as they enter new situations is still very limited. Saks and Ashforth (1997, p. 270) characterized much of that literature as "sterile," and as emphasizing "individual behaviors, attitudes, and cognitions that only scratch the surface of the individual's phenomenological experience of the dynamic process of socialization." One way to begin to address these shortcomings is to use longitudinal, qualitative methods that can capture more of the dynamics and richness of individuals' experiences as they are being socialized. A substantial body of such qualitative research on socialization to colorful and unique occupations has been published (e.g., Bourne 1967; Van Maanen 1975; McCarl 1976, 1980). However, because the socialization practices in these occupations are geared to their distinctive job demands, that research yields few insights into newcomers' experiences in more common occupations and settings.

Another likely reason that more progress has not been made in understanding the process of socialization may be that the role that individuals can play—more or less actively—in their own socialization has been neglected. Recent qualitative research by Ibarra (1999) begins to close this gap. Her study showed how young MBAs who were moving into more senior positions in consulting and investment banking adapted to their new jobs by deliberately trying out new behaviors they imitated from successful others. In the research reported here, we also aimed at filling that gap by repeatedly interviewing newcomers in ways that allowed them to report on their own ongoing efforts to adjust.

The Self, Personal Identity, and Socialization Processes

In a study of cross-cultural socialization, Erez and Earley (1993) observed that the self is an important unit of analysis for understanding how socialization processes unfold. Their observation was confirmed for us as our data collection and analyses progressed. In describing their new experiences and reactions, although they were not primed to do so, our respondents repeatedly talked about how their self-conceptions were related to their new and old work roles and tasks. They referred frequently to personal characteristics that were reflected in the skills and behaviors they used in their previous jobs and their new job. Clearly, such self-conceptions were playing a major role in their adjustment, and they thus became the core category of our emerging theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

By self-conceptions, we mean the mental representations of the self that people carry with them from one situation to another. Various perspectives on such mental representations have emerged in the literature. For example, the term identity has been used in the organizational literature to refer to several types of self-conceptions (Rosenberg and Gara 1985)—what people think of themselves (Erikson 1950), what individuals think others think of them (Cooley 1902), and the sense of belonging to groups having certain characteristics (Ashforth and Mael 1989). In the sociological literature, identities are frequently tied to salient demographic characteristics (e.g., woman, African American—Broom and Selznick 1963) or to a social role (e.g., parent, student—Secord and Backman 1974, Schneider 1976). Like self-conception, identity is thus a rather general concept that refers to various types of mental representations about the self.

Ashforth and Mael (1989, p. 21) provided a useful distinction that was especially pertinent to the accounts of our respondents; they described the *personal* identity as "encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics (e.g., bodily attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interests)." In the context of the workplace, personal identities provide mental representations of personal characteristics and attributes that are relevant to individuals' work. For experienced workers, personal identities serve as repositories of a range of attributes that have been developed and enacted in past work experiences. Some established personal identities are bound to carry forward into individuals' conceptions of themselves in new work settings. When experienced newcomers enter new settings, they are therefore likely to try to enact—to act out—to some degree the self-conceptions they have brought with them.

The personal identities that were expressed by the respondents in this study emphasize their work-related identities because they were asked about their experiences in work settings during our interviews with them. Such work-related personal identities include job skills and therefore reflect job content—especially what people know how to do. However, as the quotes reported in the paper show, people may generalize aspects of their work-related personal identities to their general identities so that how they see themselves at work is related to how they see themselves in general.

In his review of the literature on self-conceptions,[2] Demo pointed out that limitations of prevailing research methods had "prevented the processual [sic] perspective from being systematically applied in empirical research, and consequently little is known about the . . . changing qualities of human self-images" (1992, p. 306). The longitudinal qualitative methods used in this research allowed us to take a process-oriented perspective. In particular, our repeated interviewing of the same individuals allowed us to learn how they conceived of themselves as they were adjusting more or less well to their new jobs.

As pointed out earlier, socialization is an adjustment process that ideally culminates in newcomers' becoming more or less assimilated into a social group. Because it was collected over time, the data collected in this study yielded information and insights on both the processes of adjustment newcomers experienced and the results of their adjustment—the degree to which they were assimilated and moved from being outsiders to feeling like and seeing themselves as insiders.

Methods

Because the purpose of this study was to develop grounded theory about the socialization process, we adopted an exploratory stance and used an inductive approach to identify the issues we should investigate as the study progressed. We employed multiple methods to learn about the socializing organization and the experiences of experienced professional workers who had moved there from other jobs. Our first task was to develop rapport with our subjects and to become familiar with the organizational context in which the newcomers we planned to study would be working.

Research Site

The newcomers studied worked for SEMATECH—a consortium located in Austin, Texas that was founded in 1987 by a group of 14 semiconductor manufacturers and the U.S. government to do precompetitive research relevant to the manufacture of semiconductors. To carry out its research mission, SEMATECH employed so-called assignees—engineers and other professional personnel sent by its member companies to work at SEMATECH for periods of about two years. The number of personnel assigned to SEMATECH from the member companies varied over time, averaging about 200 during the period studied, 1992–1994. At that time, the organization had about 600 employees overall. Those employees who were not assignees were called direct hires. Employees, including the assignees, worked within designated "thrust" areas, some of which were technical (e.g., processes to etch wafers) and some of which were enabling (e.g., technology transfer).[3]

Sampling

Two cohorts of assignees, hired during the last half of 1992, participated in the study. The first cohort began working for SEMATECH that summer and the second cohort began working that fall. The purpose of studying two different cohorts was to develop tentative ideas from the data collected on the first group that could be further refined and verified with data from the second.

Observing both cohorts and establishing rapport with their members began at the recruiting events[4] that they attended to be interviewed for and learn about their prospective positions at SEMATECH. Shortly after their arrival at SEMATECH, some five to eight weeks later, all of the assignees hired from these two groups were contacted by the first author; all but two participated in the study.[5] Overall, 14 assignees were included in the study, 6 in the first and 8 in the second cohort. They came from 7 of the 10 member companies in SEMATECH at that time. We were able to achieve theoretical saturation (McCracken 1988) with data obtained from the second cohort; that is, we found the same conceptual categories and relationships from analyzing the second set of data as we had found in the first.

Data Collection

Data collection began before the assignees who were to be the focus of the study arrived at SEMATECH. The first author interviewed top managers and other key personnel at SEMATECH, observed various events that contributed to employee socialization, and interviewed 13 assignees who were at the end of their assignments and soon to return to their employing companies. Observations were also conducted of monthly all-hands meetings in which new assignees were introduced, of various social events, and of some work-group meetings. The purpose of this initial and continuing data gathering was to become familiar with the socialization practices and culture of the organization. More than 100 visits were made to SEMATECH by the first author during this and subsequent phases of the study.

The main data collection consisted of semistructured interviews of the 14 assignees who reported in the last half of 1992. An advantage of interviews was that we could thus enter into "the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world" (McCracken 1988, p. 9). In this study they enabled us to capture glimpses of assignees' sensemaking (Louis 1980) about their new jobs and their experiences in adjusting to working at SEMATECH. From our initial interviews and observations on site, it became obvious that it would not be very informative to observe the assignees individually while at work. Many said that they spent most of their time reading or working on the computer at their desks. Also, they worked on many different projects that involved many different kinds of tasks, including travel that made observation impractical and meaningful comparisons unlikely. Our observations were thus confined to events attended by groups.

The research plan was to interview each new assignee in the two cohorts monthly for a six-month period. Because their planned stay at SEMATECH was for only two years, assignees were expected, and probably motivated, to perform fully as soon as possible after they arrived. Our intent was to follow the adjustment of the assignees to a point where it could be reasonably expected that they would be fairly well assimilated. We chose the six-month interval with the advice of human resource managers at SEMATECH. It was possible to follow our plan for most of the assignees in the first cohort, but various circumstances, primarily work-related travel and illness, interfered with the monthly interviewing of some members of the second cohort. Nevertheless, all were interviewed multiple times as their schedules permitted. Also, one member of the first cohort left SEMATECH before the end of the six-month period. With that exception, all were interviewed near the end of their first six months. A total of 69 individual interviews were conducted with the 14 assignees in the sample. Less formal interactions with them occurred on the telephone, at social events and meetings, and in the halls and cafeteria.

On the basis of what had been learned from prior interviews and observations and from seminal literature on organizational socialization (e.g., Van Maanen and Schein 1979, Louis 1980, Trice and Beyer 1993), different interview instruments were developed for each round of interviews. Our interviewing was structured in that the interviewer covered all questions in the designated instrument with each respondent, but unstructured in the sense that questions were open-ended and very general, respondents were encouraged to follow their own thought processes and give information as it occurred to them, and probes were used. To enhance reliability, the instruments were designed so as to address some of the same issues over time. Occasionally questions were added to follow up on specific issues that had been raised in a prior interview with a given respondent.[6] To double-check our perceptions of the assignees' adjustment and assimilation, the managers of assignees in the first cohort were also interviewed after they had been working at SEMATECH for about nine months.[7] Finally, to verify our interpretation of their degree of assimilation, members of the first cohort were also reinterviewed shortly before they left SEMATECH, approximately two years after they had started work there.

All interviews were held face-to-face in private meeting rooms and were tape-recorded. They usually took about an hour. All of the interview tapes were transcribed in their entirety.

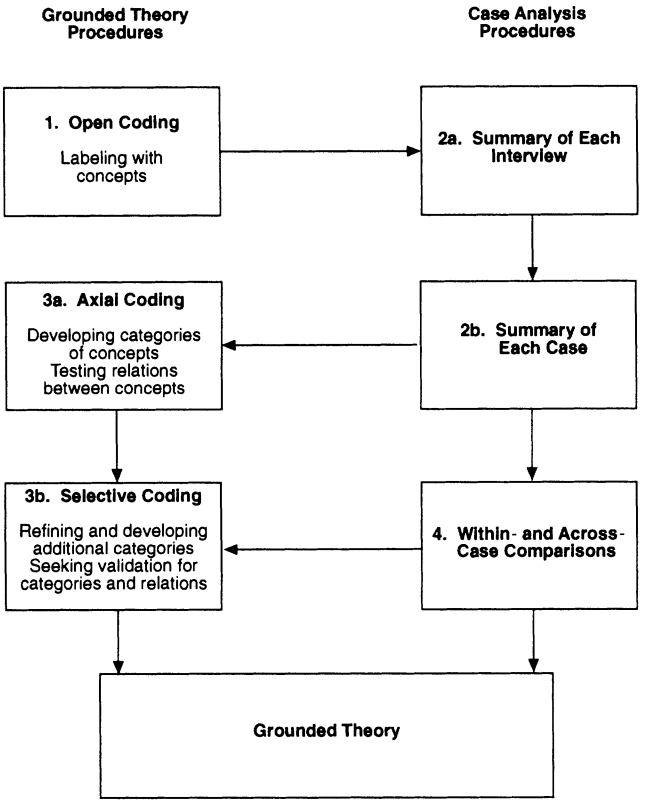
Analysis

The analysis proceeded in four phases, as shown in Figure 1: (1) transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using open coding procedures to develop conceptual labels for information of interest, (2) each assignee's experiences and reactions were then summarized, first by interview and then across all interviews to give a diachronic account of their experiences, (3) using both coded interviews and these summaries, axial and selective coding procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1990) were next employed to make connections between categories of codes and to select a core category, and (4) within-case and across-case comparisons were made to assist in uncovering relationships among categories and to provide both diachronic and synchronic reliability.

Coding

In the first phase, one of three graduate-student assistants interpretively coded each of the interview transcripts as soon as possible after the interview. They were instructed

Figure 1 Procedures Used to Analyze the Interview Data



to code anything they felt revealed either the culture of SEMATECH or the assignees' reactions, experiences, and adjustments to that culture. They were then trained in several practice sessions in which they and the first author coded several of the same interviews and compared results in a group meeting to arrive at consensus on specific codes. Using these procedures, a dictionary of codes and their operational definitions was gradually developed. As the coding proceeded, coders generated additional codes and categories as needed, and new codes were discussed and defined in weekly meetings and then added to the coding dictionary for future reference. More than 100 specific codes were generated.[8] Transcripts of the interviews and the associated codes were then entered into the *Ethnograph* computer program to facilitate retrieval of passages of interviews by code during later analyses.

The second stage of the analyses involved the same coders' writing a summary for each interview and then, after all interviews with a respondent for the initial six-month period were completed and coded, preparing an overall case summary for each assignee in the study. The interview summaries were structured to report on the same issues across respondents but left sufficiently flexible to include anything else that seemed important to the coder in explaining that assignee's experiences and responses. In the summaries of individual interviews, coders summarized the main issues reflected in the coded segments of text in each interview, gave their general interpretations of the interview, and summarized information relevant to the socialization tactics experienced by each assignee. Using the interview summaries and the coded transcripts, overall case summaries for each assignee were then constructed in which coders summarized each assignee's experiences over time.

The third stage of the analyses involved moving between these summaries and the passages of the interviews that had been bracketed by the open codes stored in *Ethnograph* to further refine and develop our emerging theory. Using axial and selective coding procedures and moving iteratively back and forth between theory and data, we (1) made connections among categories identified by open coding, and (2) selected a core category (personal identity) and systematically related it to other categories, validating those relationships and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp. 96, 116). Our objective in this phase was to exhaust whatever insights the variations across respondents and time could provide. We worked to reach theoretical saturation, including in our analysis *all* concepts that helped us to understand and explain variations in any of the assignees' ongoing adjustment and eventual assimilation. We made systematic, detailed comparisons across all cases and continuously asked ourselves questions to address any differences or unexplained variations so identified (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 62). To answer our questions and to facilitate comparisons across cases,[9] we also employed dozens of matrices and tables (Miles and Huberman 1994).

During our analysis we searched the literature for concepts and findings that would help us to understand the assignees' experiences and how various elements in them were related to each other. We constructed a variety of provisional causal models and refined them until we arrived at the one to be presented in this paper. However, first, we will present the core of our results.

Results

Because the central aim of this study was to understand how the past experience of veteran workers affects their socialization in a new work setting and job, we will start the presentation of our results with data we obtained on the assignees' past work experience. We will then present and briefly discuss data on three types of personal resources they brought with them from that past experience:

personal identities, professional know-how, and adjustment tactics. Next, we will present data on some of the ways they reported they were adjusting to working at SEMATECH. Last we present data on the outcomes of their socialization experiences—their degree of assimilation within SEMATECH after six months of work there.

We have grouped our results on tables according to conceptual categories. However, of course, respondents did not confine their remarks to neat categories, and we have tried to include in the quotes given in the tables enough of their relevant statements to put them in context. As a result, the evidence within categories shows considerable overlap, which helps to expose some of the connections between categories. We end this section with a theoretical model grounded in these results.

Table 1 presents evidence from assignees' interviews regarding their past work experience. Although all of people's past experiences provide the foundation for further socialization, in adjusting to new settings they are likely to draw heavily on those cognitions and behaviors they have acquired in similar settings in the past. Thus, past work experience is likely to have especially strong effects on socialization to new work roles and settings. Table 1 shows that the assignees varied substantially in the diversity of their experience. Two of them, the first two entries in this table, had very diverse experience. As might be expected, those with longer prior work experience also had more diverse experience. A few, including the two assignees whose quotes appear last in the table, had narrow experience confined to a single employer and work function. Most had worked in multiple settings and functions that gave them diverse work experiences.

The need and opportunity to learn new ways of thinking and behaving are greater when each new job brings a different set of challenges and task demands. Conversely, staying in the same job or occupying a series of similar jobs brings few new challenges and task demands. The diversity of individuals' work experience is thus an

Table 1 Illustrations of the Diversity of Assignees' Past Work Experience

Past Experience	Assignee Experience
Very Diverse ↓	25 years of experience. Trained as a mechanical engineer, 10 years as a naval officer building bases, 5 years building nuclear power plants, 10 years in general services with his member company. "I've been with [member company] for 10 years in the general services area. So I have been a manager of construction facilities, in addition security, communications, safety, public affairs, support functions." [9]*
	20 years of experience. "I jumped a lot between companies. I've been on the manufacturing side. . .on the product side, I developed the first robot . . . to fish pins out of a nuclear reactor. And there is no U.S. [nuclear] industry left. . .then I decided to take MBA courses and. . .there's no career here. So then I hopped on the Boeing 767 and I did aerospace software. . . ." Worked for corporate department of his member company before coming to SEMATECH. [2]
Diverse ↓	7 years of experience with member company. Initially worked as an engineer in the assembly test side of the industry. Three years ago he switched to marketing and is currently working in that function. [1]
	15 years of work experience. His first job was at a large hospital, and then he joined his member company. He has been working with his member company for 13 years: ". . .I had spent nine years in computer support and the past four years doing quality systems development." His most recent work is in statistical analysis. [12]
Narrow	11 years of experience with one small organization doing software design with object-oriented computer languages. "I started out of high school and left when I returned to college." While at school, he became an expert in a type of object-oriented computer language. He was hired by his member company straight from school, specifically to work at SEMATECH doing programming. "I ended up at SEMATECH because I happened to take an interview with [member company] in Phoenix. Semiconductor manufacturing is not my background whatsoever, and it was a bit of a lark, I guess you could say, that I took the interview. . .I'm just out of the university." [4]
	3 years of experience with member company. Prior to that, he was in school and has a M.S. and Ph.D. in electrical engineering. At member company, he worked on machinery used in the chip fabrication process. He came to SEMATECH because his project at his member company was canceled. "I've been working on the equipment enough [at member company] and really tried to improve the equipment, and that's what they're trying [to do] at SEMATECH." [5]

*Numbers in brackets are the identification numbers given assignees for this study.

indicator of the practice they have had in the past in adjusting to new settings and jobs. To the degree to which practice leads to better performance, as it usually does, newcomers with diverse experience will adjust better to new jobs than those with narrow experience. Also, diversity in experience provides opportunities to acquire a variety of personal resources that can be helpful in the future. This is, of course, why employers often prefer, as SEMATECH did, to hire experienced workers.

During our interviews, assignees often described themselves in terms related to their past and present work. Table 2 provides examples of our summaries and some illustrations of these self-descriptions, which are expressions of their work-related personal identities. Because none of our questions asked them about how they saw themselves, these volunteered self-descriptions were apparently one of the ways the assignees were making sense of their new experiences.

It is also important to note that, in talking about themselves, the assignees described their personal identities as both based in the past and as ongoing. All used the present tense and several referred specifically to past experience in their self-descriptions. At first, several talked as if they had always been as they saw themselves when they entered SEMATECH. In this sense, they had *established* personal identities they brought with them to their new jobs. Later self-descriptions revealed how these identities were enacted in the new situation. To show this progression, Table 2 includes at least two interview excerpts from several assignees, with the first excerpt taken from either their first or second interview and a second taken from either their fifth or sixth interview.

The sequence of remarks quoted in Table 2 is also revealing of the degree to which assignees' work-related personal identities were more or less multidimensional—what Markus and Wurf (1987) called multifaceted. Individuals can be said to have multidimensional work-related personal identities when they carry a broad repertoire of personal characteristics, including skills, interests, or abilities, within those identities. In contrast, individuals with more unidimensional identities see themselves as having relatively narrow repertoires of personal characteristics.

In our interviews, assignees' characterizations of their work-related personal identities ranged from multidimensional to unidimensional. Some assignees described themselves in ways that suggested they had broad, multidimensional identities that encompassed multiple skills, interests, or other characteristics. These assignees' self-descriptions therefore left open multiple ways in which they could see themselves functioning effectively at SEMATECH. In contrast, other assignees described narrow, unidimensional identities. They envisioned only one way in which they could function effectively at SEMATECH—for example, using only one skill or pursuing only one interest.

In the cases of the assignees studied, by comparing assignees' self-descriptions with their past experience (Table 1), we began to discern how the diversity of past experience can affect people's identities by providing them with more or less multidimensional identities. We have ordered the self-descriptions of the assignees given in Table 2 accordingly. Those with diverse experience were more likely to have enacted a wider variety of selves in the past, and thus were more likely to be able to envision more possible selves in the future (Markus and Nurius 1986). This provided them with more multidimensional work-related personal identities and more ways in which they could enact their identities at SEMATECH.

Assignee 1 provides an interesting example of an experienced worker with diverse experience and a multidimensional identity. He was hired to work in SEMATECH's technology transfer group, which was responsible for transferring SEMATECH's discoveries to the member companies. As shown in Table 2, in his first interview he expressed a personal identity that included what he called a "unique" combination of both marketing and engineering experience that he felt would help him both to understand SEMATECH's discoveries and to effectively market them to the member companies. This multidimensional, broad identity could have been enacted in many ways, and by his third interview he appeared to have enacted his personal identity in SEMATECH by describing himself as a "matchmaker," someone who liked to bring people together both in his professional and personal life. By his fifth interview he said that his matchmaking efforts had ". . .worked out well."

Our interviews revealed other factors that contributed to assignees' adjustment at SEMATECH. Table 3 presents quotes from our interviews, in which the assignees described four kinds of personal adjustment tactics that they were using at SEMATECH to help them adjust to their new jobs there. It is likely that the assignees had developed these tactics during their past work experience and, thus also brought them with them to their new jobs at SEMATECH. Indeed, some made it explicit that they had tried these tactics before. They spoke of them as part of a repertoire of behaviors they would customarily use in any new work situation. Only two of these tactics, information seeking and goal setting, have been previously identified as ways in which newcomers adjust to new work situations (Miller and Jablin 1991, Saks and Ashforth 1997). The other two have not been previously documented in socialization research. Intentional *learning by*

Table 2 Assignees' Entering Work-Related Personal Identities and Their Enactment Over Time

Identities	Assignee Descriptions
Multidimensional	Assignee 1.
	first interview: *Unique mix of marketing and engineering knowledge.* "So that's the biggest reason why they brought me here, because it's a real unique point of view to have [an engineer] who has actually done marketing for a living."
	third interview: *Matchmaker.* "My personality over the last two years has converged to what I would call matchmaker status. I like to be a matchmaker. . .and I do it both socially and professionally."
	fifth interview: Successful matchmaker. ". . .and real intimately, I know these people [SEMATECH workers in thrust areas]. I go to their technical advisory boards. I go to their workshops, and I write articles with them. I'm real involved, so if I smell an opportunity [in a SEMATECH member company] for their technology, I can be a matchmaker. And it's worked out well."
	Assignee 10.
	first interview: *Project manager.* "I'm a project type of person. I can manage a project, I can manage people on a project. . ."
	sixth interview: Successful project manager. "I'm relocated here, I'm here, I know my way around, I'm comfortable with my project team. . .we're redefining the way factory systems, software systems go together and interoperate. I believe in what we're doing."
	Assignee 9.
	first interview: *Strategic thinker, process designer.* " I'm a strategic thinker. . .I like to work in the strategic realm.. . .I'm also very process-oriented. I like to design processes that work well."
	fifth interview: Successful process designer. "I think the improvements to the strategic process, and the flexibility of the process in the face of major changes, is an accomplishment [for himself and for SEMATECH]."
Unidimensional	Assignee 4.
	first interview: Object-oriented programmer. "This specification [for the project he expects to work on], they would like it to be encoded in a program that is done in object-oriented technology. . .This is what I've been doing for a couple of years and it's nothing new to me."
	sixth interview: *Unutilized object-oriented programmer.* ". . .the entire project has changed character and shape. . .and it has become a clearly different project than what I was told I would be doing. . .and I think that's contributed dramatically to my desire to accept something else. . .I can't avoid it [programming]—it's in my blood."
	Assignee 6.
	first interview: Top expert in field. ". . .I'm the expert in my field. . .I don't want to be cocky, but this is the truth, at [member company] I had to talk to three different VPs to let me go here. So I mean I was one of the best, the best guy from [member company]."
	sixth interview: Top expert in field, unappreciated at SEMATECH. "Here, even if you do a good job, where do you get recognized for it? That's another thing I feel about this job. . .even if you present a diamond, many people only see a stone." [6]

doing implies acting experimentally—taking action to learn the results of those actions. *Avoiding* involves thinking and acting consciously so as *not* to do something that might lead to negative consequences.

The fact that assignees volunteered that they were using these tactics shows that they were aware of the need to adjust themselves to the new situation. Some had thought rather carefully about how to do so. Again, some seemed to welcome the chance to learn new things while others did not.

Table 4 gives some illustrations of how assignees described the know-how they had acquired in the past and how it fit with their new jobs at SEMATECH. Table 4 thus presents evidence of relevant job skills and knowledge they brought with them. It is interesting to note that when they talked about what they knew how to do, they usually compared that to what their new jobs involved. Some assignees said their new jobs were very similar to ones they had had in the past, and therefore fit with know-how they had already established. Others reported little fit between their know-how and their new jobs. We have ordered the descriptions of their new jobs from those showing much fit to those showing little fit in job content. Clearly, with greater fit, workers should find it easier to

Table 3 Examples of Types of Adjustment Tactics Described

Adjustment Tactics	Assignee Descriptions
Proactive information-seeking	"In my case, what it takes to get the job done right now is to understand the culture here, understand the technology, because I'm coming from an assembly test background where this is a wafer fab background. To that end, it [my job] has required me to do a lot of reading and a lot of rubbing shoulders and understanding what's happening." [1]
	". . .[To learn about SEMATECH], I do a lot of reading and I talk to people. But initially, I do mostly reading. . .I've been reading books on semiconductor manufacturing and basic textbooks. That's what I need to know. And I've also been researching some of the strategic planning techniques because I think we, sooner or later, we've got to improve on the process, and that's going to be involved in introducing some more techniques of strategic planning. That's basically where I start when I don't know what I'm doing—is just doing some personal research." [9]
Goal setting	"For me, I'm going to look at three different [criteria]: first, deliver what they expect. Second, go beyond their expectations that could be used for engineering. The third one is [to make] better recommendations of strategies that can be utilized to have a better impact on the industry, so that's the three kinds of levels I'm looking at. So I'm going to try to make it practical [more] than anything else, because even the director told me: Why are you going to SEMATECH? To us you are very practical, SEMATECH is impractical. I didn't listen until I came and realized. But I'm going to make whatever is necessary to do it." [6]
	"My professional side is going to do the following: I am going to obviously pick up some very important projects that I am working on, do an excellent job at them, try, in the meantime, to transfer to [member company] anything that I see may benefit them, and at the end of my assignment, I will try to also transfer my assignment to a friend." [13]
Learning by doing	". . .I'm putting my thumb in different pies and hands in different cookie jars, just to kind of see who catches me and to a certain degree how far I can go. I believe that as long as you act responsibly no one is going to stop you because people want progress." [1]
	"What I've always done in a new situation is pick up the enablers as quickly as possible—the phone, the PC, and the next enabler. The next level up in sophistication would be how are decisions made." [1]
Avoiding	". . .I have to say that as a kind of overt strategy, I'm trying not to get too close. . . . I used to be very close with the people I worked with in other groups, and found that can cause conflict. I've found that I feel a lot freer. I know these people all in a work relationship and we're friends and maybe we'll have lunch once in a while, but I try not to do things after work with the people. I try to keep a distance. I'm finding that it's a lot less complicated." [1]
	". . .you try to avoid peoples' hot buttons or try to figure out what they are so you can avoid them. . . . I don't want to bump heads with anyone at this time." [3]
	"Don't make people mad at you—You have to get along in a place like this. That's what it's all about. . . . I've had pretty good luck dealing with people in my area. Probably because I don't make them mad. I try to come up to people and say, 'hey, how's it going,' you know, 'what did you think of the game last night?' Things like that." [8]

adjust because they already know how to think about and do substantial parts of their new jobs. In addition, of course, those with more diverse experience were likely to have a greater range of know-how. Also, as mentioned earlier, those with diverse experience had already learned to adjust to various types of jobs in the past. It is not surprising that in the process they would have developed various tactics to help them adjust, as illustrated in Table 3. Their personal adjustment tactics were also, in this sense, part of their professional know-how.

Table 5 presents some examples of how the assignees talked about their ongoing adjustment. We have grouped their reactions into six categories. The first two categories show, as Louis (1980) predicted, that their sensemaking compared their present and past experience. This tendency was also evident in the earlier tables. The second two categories focus on behavioral adjustments they were making or refusing to make to adjust to the differences they perceived between their past and present jobs and settings. These behavioral adjustments differed from assignees' adjustment tactics in that assignees used tactics

Table 4 Illustrations of Types of Know-How and Degrees of Job Fit

Job Fit	Assignee Comments
Much	". . .I also felt that, after I understood what the [SEMATECH] job was, that I could do the job pretty well. . . . It's not much different than project management. And I'd been a project manager or a program manager all my life." [9]
↓	"I don't think your job changes [across situations and over time], I think technology and devices change—We're getting bigger and bigger. The job, however, stays the same. You're just doing it on newer and better equipment." [14]
↓	"For the first few years [at member company] I worked totally in clean rooms, so I'm not surprised and I am very familiar with that. . . . I feel pretty good about my project, and I did use a lot of my skills, which I had never been able to demonstrate before in my own company." [7]
↓	"I spent 9 years with [member company] doing computer support, where I worked on everything from the IBM mainframes down to PCs and everything in between. . .and now here I'm doing basically support work again, but in a different sense. . .this is configuration management. . .where you get all of your software and your documents together in one place and organize it and put version control on it, so you can track what you were doing. . .[at member company] it was very important to me to be able to track everything that went on, and I used those kind of tools, and that was just second nature to me." [11]
↓	"I understand the tracking system here because I set up the same system at our facility. . . . And it's the exact same system, but the way they have it set up here doesn't compare to what we have for data collection. . .the data's there, you just can't get it out of the system. There's no method to get it out of the system. So a lot of work needs to be done." [8]
Little	". . .[only] a rather small percentage [of my past experience is useful] because the type of work is different and the environment was different. . . . the project I was sent here for is not as it was described—[It's] quite a bit different. That was perhaps the most immediately damaging surprise." [4]
	". . . my mode of operation is significantly different than the way I used to operate [at member company]. So I, yes, I would definitely say I am operating somewhat differently now. . . . It's a different technical function. . . . I have a background in the technical aspect of it, but I haven't been working in that field technically when I was at [member company]." [3]

proactively to try to shape their own socialization experiences, but adjusted their behaviors after those experiences as a reaction to them. The last two categories in the table concern whether or not assignees were finding positive value in their SEMATECH experience or rejecting its possible value. Our observations indicated that assignees did not immediately embrace or resist assimilation into SEMATECH—Rather they moved toward or away from assimilation over time as they made sense of their experiences there.

Each pair of adjustment processes includes an example of a positive and a negative adjustment. All provide further evidence of the sensemaking and other efforts assignees made during their adjustment to their new jobs.

Table 6 reports data concerning whether or not the assignees felt they had been assimilated into SEMATECH during their first six months of work there. Three assignees, Assignees 3, 4, and 6, failed to adjust. Two of those three, Assignees 4 and 6, remained outsiders. Their remarks indicate they were uncomfortable with both the work and general culture of SEMATECH. Assignee 3 was not as negative about the general culture, but did not want to do the type of job he was asked to do. He "adjusted" by assuming a marginal status in which he stayed in the job and resisted attempts to make him a manager. When his supervisor failed to give him opportunities to do research using his specific technical skills and knowledge, he busied himself with minor tasks that aided his project group, and simply put in his time and waited until the end of his assignment period. In their statements to us, both he and his direct supervisor indicated that his know-how did not fit with that used by the group to which he was assigned, but neither he nor his manager did anything positive (such as training) to change the situation, and instead tolerated it.

All three of those who failed to adjust and become assimilated reported gaps between their expectations about their jobs and those received from role senders at SEMATECH. These discrepancies were subsequently verified through interviews with their SEMATECH supervisors. On the other hand, quotes from most of the assignees that we have categorized as reflecting assimilation into the organization reflect both feelings of comfort and a positive identification with the organization.

Table 5 Illustrations of Adjustment Processes

Adjustment Processes	Assignee Comments
Finding continuity between past behavior and behavior at SEMATECH	"I'm always the first one to jump into something new. At [member company], I was always the first one to jump in." [11] "My mentor at [member company] has some exceptional character traits, and I watch him carefully. My manager here, who's leaving, also has some exceptional character traits: he's action oriented, truly a role model. I just try to stay humble and apply it." [7]
Finding contrasts between past behavior and behavior at SEMATECH	"I can't synch up what I do here with what they wanted me to do at [member company]. So it leaves you with this feeling that you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing." [3] "It is much easier to work within [member company] than it is to work within SEMATECH." [12]
Adjusting past behavior to fit SEMATECH	"I've been trying to deal with things more diplomatically than I would otherwise. I think that's probably a better way to get things done in an environment like this." [3] "I realize that I've got to stop saying: 'At [member company], we do things a certain way.'" [10]
Resisting learning new behaviors	"I didn't come here to learn, I did not really come here to learn. . . . I knew I wouldn't learn because I'm the top expert in my field, so I don't learn. I will learn [from] the other experts in the other fields, also increase my network, and make more money and travel more. That was my goal." [6] "We're [at SEMATECH] focusing a lot on the short-term deliverables, as we call them. So we spend the time fighting fires a lot of the time. And that's not totally healthy. We should spend more efforts towards the future—What is going to happen 10 years from now." [13]
Finding positive value in SEMATECH experience for personal identity	"Just being at SEMATECH broadens you, and I think the SEMATECH experience is, at least my current manager uses it as, a positive thing." [13] "It [SEMATECH] also has a special value in the contribution to the overall industry, and I sincerely believe that's a valuable thing for SEMATECH to do and it's a valuable thing for me to get involved in." [5]
Rejecting value of SEMATECH experience for personal identity	"That kind of place [SEMATECH] is not worth my time and career." [6] "They asked me what I wanted to do. I told them, obviously, I prefer the technical work over project management. And they mentioned project management and I'm kind of generally being pushed in that direction, but I'm also being given the lead for some technical work. . .but not nearly as much as I'd prefer to be at something, as opposed to managing something and not being an expert at it. I don't particularly care for that very much." [3]

Figure 2 presents a schematic diagram of the grounded theory that we derived from these results and from other data too voluminous to report in detail. The center of the diagram focuses on the results already reported. The shaded areas surrounding it add the most theoretically relevant aspects of the context in which the assignees' experiences occurred. During many visits to SEMATECH, we observed many aspects of the context. These observations were supported and further explicated by our search and examination of relevant literature as our analyses proceeded. In the discussion that follows, we will use these additional insights to help explain how the various elements in the diagram affected each other and the assimilation of the assignees into the SEMATECH culture.

Discussion

The data reported in this paper describe the most common type of socialization experience in U.S. work organizations—that undergone by experienced workers. While it is not surprising that past experience strongly influences the subsequent socialization of veteran workers to new jobs and work settings, the processes through which this influence works have not been systematically investigated

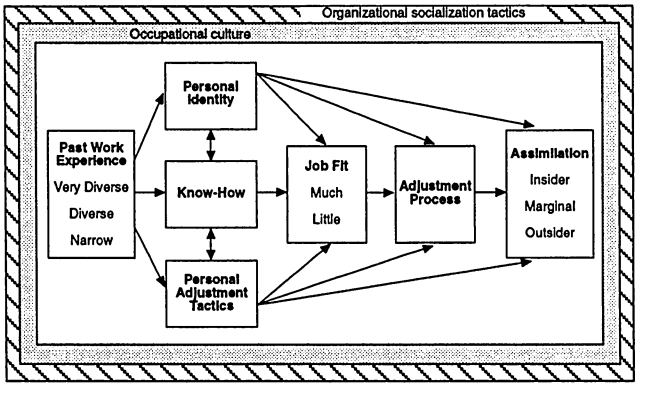
Table 6 Examples of Degrees of Assimilation Expressed

Degree of Assimilation	Assignee Comments
Inside	"[a new employee] came in about the third week in October. . .and I know I'm the visionary and he's the focused, organized one, and I've slipped him into a slot where we really need him. In fact, he was the guy who initiated the system. He said, 'It's bullshit around here. It's all fluff and puff.' And he forced me to really take a look at how I've become part of the system, and I'm not doing a lot for the system—I've become part of it." [2] "I come in here now and it's pretty run-of-the-mill. There aren't any surprises—I'm fitting in pretty good. . .there's no anxiety of coming in any more. I'm not afraid that somebody's going to ask me a question I won't know the answer to. . . . It's incredible, this place, what you actually absorb and you don't really know it. Working here in the last six months—There's no way I would have gotten all that knowledge working back at [member company] for the last six months." [8] "I don't feel like a newcomer. Now people are coming in that are new, so I feel like I have to help them." [12]
Marginal	"It [his job at SEMATECH] was going to be more, my understanding, much more involved, you know, hands-on kinds of technology development. It's different, probably more of a project manager type. That's one thing that's changed. . . .I'm trying to resolve that now. I'm not real happy about it." [3]
Outside	". . .it's funny, because just before that, he [member company manager] had said. . .that [member company] tends to buy their software, and not make it. And then I said, 'That's precisely why I don't see a future for me at [member company].' Because I make things. If somebody buys something that you're sort of in charge of, then you're not needed, right? You should work for the company that's going to make it, so they can buy it." [4] "It's like, you know, I'm a Yankee, or something like that. Something is just a little bit off here and maybe I belong in the Midwest." [4] "My boss at [member company] gave me a task in the group, and I finished the job in probably 35 hours, stayed there Saturday night. But I did it so fast, so quickly, I felt great, because it was recognized. There you get recognized for it. Here, even if you do a good job, where do you get recognized for it? That's another thing I feel about this job. . .even if you present a diamond, many people only see a stone." [6] "See, for me, I'm from a very competitive environment, [member company] culture, I liked it and I always get the outstanding awards by myself, and I liked that, and I liked it, being spotted, you know. That's what drives me. These people there [at a SEMATECH meeting], their opinion was those things make the teamwork worse, because they're noncompeting in nature. So that, for me, is a total repulsive response and culture to me, because look at these guys, they don't want to work hard." [6]

and documented. Nor has past research revealed what it is that experienced workers bring with them that influences their adjustment in new work settings. As diagrammed in Figure 2, this study revealed four avenues for such influence: (1) the diversity of workers' past experience, (2) assignees' work-related personal identities, (3) the personal tactics they had developed to help them adjust to new work situations, and (4) the fit between know-how acquired in the past and their new jobs. Through these avenues, and perhaps others not revealed in this study, the diversity of past experience influenced newcomers' ongoing adjustment and eventual assimilation.

The next logical step in this inquiry is to understand and explain how and why their work experience had these effects on the socialization process and outcomes of these veteran workers. In her seminal article, Louis (1980) pointed to sensemaking as the central process through which newcomers adjust to new work settings. As illus-

Figure 2 Grounded Theory Model of the Socialization of Experienced Workers



trated by the quotes reported in the tables, how the assignees talked about their experiences gave us glimpses into such ongoing sensemaking processes. These quotes confirm that, while adjusting to their new jobs, the assignees engaged in considerable sensemaking.

Because sensemaking is retrospective (Weick 1995), it is bound to be influenced by what has or has not happened in the past. Past experience will affect adjustment to any new setting by providing the cognitive raw materials that people use to make sense of new situations. If the experience is diverse, the worker has had the opportunity to pick up a greater variety of materials to work with than if the experience is narrow. In turn, the variety of materials available at a given time puts limits on how cognitive structures can be built or changed through sensemaking.

It follows that workers with greater diversity of experience will have a higher probability of acquiring some raw materials that will be useful in making sense of and adjusting behaviorally to new settings they enter than will those with narrow experience.[10] The materials they have accumulated, in effect, become important personal resources upon which they can build in the future. The conceptual categories reported in Tables 2–4 represent bundles of such resources that assignees indicated they were using to make sense of their new situations.

We used one-headed arrows in Figure 2 to indicate that the personal identities, know-how, and adjustment tactics we found in our analyses were derived from sensemaking based on past experience. The two-headed arrows in the diagram portray personal identities and know-how as interacting, because what one knows becomes part of one's sense of self. That personal identity, in turn, could contribute to acquiring know-how by its openness to new ideas. Similarly, know-how contributes to the development of adjustment tactics that, in turn, become a subset of know-how through sensemaking about their perceived degree of success.

It is well accepted that sensemaking is also central in the process of creating, modifying, and maintaining personal identities (Fine 1996, Pratt 2000). In his book on sensemaking, Weick (1995) goes so far as to argue that sensemaking itself is grounded in identity construction. He also suggests that one of the needs of individuals in identity construction is to develop and maintain a sense of self-efficacy. Because the SEMATECH assignees were carefully recruited and chosen to be promising contributors, they probably joined SEMATECH with a sense of self-efficacy in their areas of expertise. This is evident in most of the quotes given in Tables 1 and 2, especially in the personal identities they described.

Swann (1984, 1996) argued that adults are strongly motivated to maintain consistency in their self-views, and has repeatedly found that people seek out and try to influence situations so they can verify how they have come to see themselves (Swann et al. 1992, McNulty and Swann 1994). If people need to maintain both self-efficacy and self-consistency, it seems likely that experienced workers will strive to maintain those aspects of their established identities that reflect their past successes. In this study, their chances of doing so were enhanced if they had diverse experience that included (1) doing some of the same tasks they assumed in their new jobs and (2) practice in adjusting to several different jobs. This allowed them to develop broad, multidimensional identities. Those with narrow experience were more likely to have narrow, unidimensional identities. They also perceived greater threats to their identities and their sense of self-efficacy as they tried to make sense of their new situations, because they brought with them a smaller store of cognitive materials and other personal resources, including the confidence that they could switch jobs and still be efficacious.

Narrow experience could also interfere with adjustment to a new setting in two additional ways: it may give the experienced newcomer an inappropriate set of expectations or it may give the newcomer such a strong set of preferences for some kinds of work over others that the newcomer never accepts the task demands of a new job. Data from Tables 1 and 5 support these arguments. For example, the entries for Assignee 4 show that he never found a way to use the computer language in which he was expert at SEMATECH, as he had expected to do, and that he left early rather than do other types of programming or computer work. Also, from his remarks, it appears that his sense of self-efficacy may have been based on how good he was at programming in one particular computer language.

The last entry in Table 1, for Assignee 5, shows that he also had narrow work experience but, because his limited experience working with semiconductor manufacturing machinery fit with the requirements of his job at SEMATECH, he was almost immediately able to perform his job effectively and he therefore adjusted successfully.

However, good job fit alone did not guarantee that assignees would successfully adjust to SEMATECH. Assignee 6 was hired to be a business marketing analyst, and both he and his supervisor agreed that he was the best in the nation at doing that kind of work. However, Assignee 6's unidimensional personal identity and the inappropriate expectations associated with that identity undermined his adjustment. He saw himself as the best in the world at what he did and he expected to receive a great deal more recognition than he did. In addition, as his remarks quoted in Table 5 make clear, he was so sure of his own superiority that he did not think he had anything to learn and disdained the possibilities of doing so.

His sense of self-efficacy seemed to be dependent on receiving praise and recognition from others he respected. Because his assessment of SEMATECH itself was so negative, no amount of recognition he might receive there could suffice to restore his sense of self-efficacy. To salve his ego, his member company was eventually asked by his supervisor to request his return after only six months at SEMATECH.

These examples are presented to illustrate in more detail the strong effects of past experience, which emerged consistently among all of the assignees in the sample. Although our sample is limited to one organization and to a particular type of worker, it seems unlikely that the patterns of influence we observed are limited to this one work setting. We expect that the theoretical model in the center of Figure 2 may be applicable in many settings employing experienced workers, especially if the workers' personal identities are heavily imbued with work-related imagery. Workers who consider themselves professionals are especially likely to have such personal identities because they are likely to incorporate the favorable social identity usually associated with professions into their personal identity.

In considering the likely generalizability of our model,[11] it is also important to consider contextual factors that extant theory and empirical findings suggest could also have affected the assignees' adjustment and assimilation in this setting. It became clear from our observations that SEMATECH employed individualized investiture tactics (Jones 1986, Van Maanen and Schein 1979) to socialize the new assignees. Following a two-day orientation that focused on policy and safety issues, they individually received informal on-the-job training in their specific jobs from peers or supervisors. They were given no specific steps or timetable to follow and had no obvious role models to guide them. Especially noteworthy was that there was no attempt to divest them of past or current identities. Rather, those identities were reinforced because they knew they had been hired for personal attributes (including acquired know-how) that they already possessed and were expected to put to use in their new jobs.

In our analysis, this investiture aspect of the assignees' socialization at SEMATECH appeared crucial in explaining their adjustment. Despite the changes they faced, most of the assignees did not experience any threats to their existing identities after coming to SEMATECH. Rather, most reported successfully enacting those identities in their new jobs. From their accounts of their experiences, it appeared that they proceeded on the basis of acquired know-how and some trial and error to figure out what they should do and how they should do it. Those few who did experience pressures to change their work identities strongly resisted them. In these cases, the strengthening that investiture tactics gave to existing identities may have actually hampered successful adjustments.

Also, our data on job fit indicate that successful socialization using the investiture tactic depends on prior acquisition of relevant know-how and other personal resources. When job fit is missing, newcomers need to do a great deal more sensemaking to adjust and may lack the raw materials they need to succeed in making sense of their new jobs. On the other hand, with some degree of fit, newcomers will find their adjustment to their new work settings relatively smooth when investiture tactics are used.

In addition, our data showed that, even when they are hired for specific skills and knowledge they have presumably acquired in the past, newcomers may find that their new jobs call for know-how that goes beyond what they have previously done. They then must activate personal adjustment tactics that they have developed in the past or can now develop to help them learn what they need to know to fit into the new setting.

Other aspects of their jobs may use skills and routines that are familiar because they are part of their culture. It seems likely and is consistent with our observations in this organization that many assignees shared an occupational culture (Trice 1993, Fine 1996) and an industry-based culture (Gordon 1991, Abrahamson and Fombrun 1994, Phillips 1994) that eased their transitions into SEMATECH. Because of the cultural knowledge they shared, they reported few surprises, as Louis' (1980) model predicted newcomers would experience. Because learning and belonging to a culture involve cognitive and social processes that unfold over time, such cultural memberships are also rooted in past experience.

Trice and Beyer (1993) argued that cultures develop to help people cope with the inevitable uncertainties of life, and that cultures do so by providing accepted belief systems, norms, and values that prescribe how to deal with those uncertainties. It follows that occupational and industry cultures provide their members with a wealth of materials for sensemaking about the particular uncertainties endemic in those occupations and industries. Most of the assignees studied clearly belonged to an engineering subculture (Schein 1996). Of the 14, 12 had at least one degree in engineering and called themselves engineers. Through their education and previous work, they had been indoctrinated with the dominant logic and values of that occupation. Most were also well schooled in its cultural rituals—how to structure and pursue a research project, what literature to consult, how to conduct themselves

and report their progress in meetings of their research groups, what methods to use in carrying out their research, and what criteria would be applied to their results.

Through processes of social identification, members of such distinctive occupational subcultures are likely to internalize the associated beliefs, values, and expected behaviors over time. In the process, as we have already suggested, the social identities derived from belonging to the occupation and working with others in the industry become incorporated into their personal identities. This seemed to have happened for most of the assignees that we studied.

It seems that belonging to a common industry[12] and occupational group made their adjustment and assimilation easier. As pointed out earlier, the use of the investiture tactics also seemed to ease most of their transitions to a new job and work setting.

Thus, the core concepts and processes diagrammed in Figure 2 may not be as evident in settings lacking strong occupational or industry cultures, or in those employing divestiture rather than investiture tactics.

Conclusions

The results of this study begin to fill a gap in the literature on organizational socialization by examining how experienced workers adjust to new jobs and are assimilated into new work settings. In particular, data collected from repeated interviews with new hires revealed that newcomers employ several types of personal resources derived from past experience in sensemaking about their new jobs and organizations. These include personal identities (a sense of who they are), professional know-how (a sense of what they know), and adjustment tactics (a sense of how to adjust).

The major findings of this study are:

•Newcomers with more diverse experience are better able to adjust to new settings than are newcomers with narrow experience, probably because diverse experience provides a richer store of raw materials for sensemaking, including multidimensional personal identities and more possible selves.

•Experienced newcomers strive to maintain established identities they bring with them to their new work settings.

•Newcomers are active participants in their own socialization through the enactment of these identities, which then guide their sensemaking.

•Investiture socialization tactics tend to reinforce these established identities and may thus make newcomers unwilling to change and therefore hinder their adjustment.

•Occupational cultures can influence newcomers' adjustment by providing ways of thinking and acting on the job.

In addition, this study contributes to existing theory by capturing some of the richness of the processes individuals undergo as they adjust to new settings. The findings flesh out Louis' theory of socialization by revealing some of the raw materials that newcomers derive from their past experiences and incorporate into their sensemaking in new settings. The study also supplements the existing qualitative data on socialization with observations of the use of investiture rather than divestiture tactics. Finally, the data revealed two new tactics that individuals use to help them adjust to new work situations: learning by doing and avoiding.

Implications for Future Research

With workers changing jobs more and more often during their lifetimes, it is important to extend research on socialization to include the socialization of newcomers who are experienced workers. This research reminds us that they are not tabulae rasae when they enter organizations. From their past experience they bring a variety of personal resources that influence their adjustment and the likelihood of their successful assimilation. Our understanding of organizational socialization is incomplete until we better understand how experienced newcomers adapt to new work situations by building on their past.

Also, there is a need for more in-depth study of investiture socialization, both because it is understudied and because it is the most frequent type of socialization. In particular, professionals of various kinds are, like the people in this study, usually selected by their employers for rather specific sets of skills and experiences. Our data indicate that professionals changing jobs could very well experience difficulties in adjusting because of a lack of fit between the new job and what they bring with them from the past. How such newcomers manage to find appropriate fits with past experience and enduring personal identities and how they cope with a lack of fit are surely issues that deserve further exploration.

Implications for Practice

Organizations that hire experienced workers for the skills those individuals already possess are likely to employ investiture socialization tactics that encourage those individuals to maintain identities they have already established and to use personal resources they have acquired in past jobs. Both the resources that the individuals bring and the identities that they enact with them are likely to have a powerful influence on their socialization experiences. In divestiture situations (such as in the military), organizations can do things to strip individuals' identities from them and reduce or nullify the impact of individuals' past experience. On the other hand, in investiture situations, individuals' success in their new setting is going to

depend on whether the identities they enact and whether the personal tactics and other resources they employ are effective in the new work setting.

All together, these findings suggest that when organizations are selecting from among a pool of experienced workers, they should attend not only to their skill sets, but also try to identify and select individuals with personal identities that are multidimensional. One indicator of this may be the diversity of their part experience. Such individuals are not only more likely to be able to adapt to their new settings in the short term, but they are also likely to have acquired other resources that will enable them to cope effectively with changes in their work situations in the future.

Acknowledgments

Although the second author wishes Janice Beyer were here to see this paper published, he is very grateful that he was fortunate enough to work with her on this research and to learn from her as one of her students. On her behalf, he would like to acknowledge the cooperation of many SEMATECH employees and managers; the financial support of the Marketing Science Institute; the coding and other assistance of Mason Carpenter, Carl Maeder, and LiLi Chin; and the helpful comments of Jim Schmidtke, Bill Swann, two anonymous reviewers, and Herminia Ibarra.

Endnotes

*Janice M. Beyer passed away in June 2001.

[1]In this paper, adjustment refers to processes newcomers undergo trying to fit into the organization, and assimilation refers to a two-way process in which newcomers choose and are chosen to become insiders in the organization.

[2]We recognize that terms other than identity have been used to theorize about self-conceptions. Two of these theories are especially relevant to this study—those concerning possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986) and the self-view (Swann 1996)—and will therefore be incorporated in this discussion of our results.

[3]Further details on the history and governance of SEMATECH are available in Spencer and Grindley (1993), Browning et al. (1995), and Browning and Shetler (2000).

[4]The recruiting events for prospective assignees were called Windows. Candidates usually brought their spouses, who toured schools and living areas. The candidates went on tours of the SEMATECH facility, heard indoctrinating speeches from top executives, and attended social events, including a dinner cruise with their spouses and a cross section of SEMATECH managers. They were also individually interviewed by the managers and all members of their prospective research groups.

[5]Neither were newcomers because one had worked at SEMATECH for his member company for several months before officially becoming an assignee, and the other was beginning his second assignment at SEMATECH.

[6]A list of illustrative questions is available from the second author.

[7]"Official" data on assignee performance were given to the member companies, but were not available to use because they were considered too confidential.

[8]An outline of the codes used to analyze transcripts of interviews is available from the second author.

[9]Earlier drafts of this paper containing some of these details are available from the second author.

[10]While in many cases depth of experience can also be advantageous, in this set of assignees, narrow work experience that might be indicative of depth appeared to preclude flexibility in taking on new jobs because it gave assignees rather fixed personal identities.

[11]Although we have speculated about the degree to which our findings may generalize across other individuals and settings, the focus of this kind of research, grounded theory, is to develop theory that is grounded in intensive study of the people, phenomena, or situations of interest to the researchers (McCracken 1988). However, qualitative research methods cannot demonstrate how widely that theory can be generalized to the rest of the world (McCracken 1988, Strauss and Corbin 1990). Therefore, the question of whether or not our findings will generalize across a wider variety of settings and individuals is one we leave for future empirical research.

[12]Because all of the assignees came from the member companies of SEMATECH, they belonged to the semiconductor manufacturing industry.

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