

Newcomer safety: What is the role of organizational support and self-determination theory?

Victoria Santana, Emmalee Diederichs, Anika Johnson, Rosalyn Stoa, PhD., & Olivia Detry*
 Colorado State University
 *Minnesota State University - Mankato

Abstract

New employees (i.e., newcomers) often experience poor well-being, including stress, anxiety, and increased risk of injury (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006; Bena et al., 2013). Through socialization, newcomers adapt to their roles and organizational culture (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). While research emphasizes the importance of newcomer safety, the role of socialization in influencing safety outcomes is underexplored. Guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study examines how **socialization is related to new employee safety attitudes and knowledge**. Additionally we propose that **perceived organizational support (POS) moderates the relationship between socialization and need satisfaction**, potentially *strengthening* safety outcomes.

Introduction

- **Socialization has not yet been studied in relation to newcomer safety knowledge and behaviors.**
- Newcomer socialization can be **structured** (institutionalized) or **autonomous** (individualized).
 - Structured approaches in organizations have been linked to reduced uncertainty, greater efficacy, and job satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2007; Bauer et al., 2025)
- **Self Determination Theory** (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) suggests fulfilling **autonomy, competence, and relatedness** needs enhances compliance with safety rules, organizational commitment, job satisfaction (Burstyn et al., 2010; Van Den Broeck et al., 2019), and likely, safety knowledge and attitudes.
 - SDT allows us to **examine specific mechanisms** by which socialization tactics **influence safety behaviors**. For instance, if newcomers are urged to take ownership over their safety during the socialization process, their needs of autonomy and competence may lead to greater safety practices.
- **Perceived organizational support (POS) is when employees perceive their organization supports and cares for their needs (Eisenberger et al., 1986).**
 - Employees rely on POS when they are faced with stressful, uncertain, or constraining circumstances. Thus, **low POS** may benefit from **institutionalized socialization tactics** (Perrot et al., 2014), as these tactics help mitigate these uncertainties and anxieties (Ashforth & Saks, 1996),
 - Therefore, when individuals are socialized through institutionalized tactics, and feel valued by their organization, their feelings of relatedness, competence, and autonomy may increase, and potentially strengthen safety outcomes.

Methodology

- Data was collected in October-November 2024
 - Participants (N = 463) completed an online survey
 - Large Steel Manufacturing Company in U.S.
 - Ages ranged from 18 to 62 (M = 32)
 - Gender: 79 Female, 371 Male, 13 Other
 - Work duration ranged from 1 to 12 months (M = 6.14)
- Measures include: **Socialization Tactics Scale** (Jones, 1986): $\alpha = .90$; **Perceived Organizational Support** (POS; Eisenberger et al., 1997): $\alpha = .65$; **Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale** (Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006): $\alpha = .82$; **Occupational Health and Safety Vulnerability Measure** (Guzman et al., 2022; safety voice: $\alpha = .60$; perceived safety policies and systems: $\alpha = .84$; perceived safety knowledge: $\alpha = .73$)

Methodology

- Companies should **tailor onboarding efforts** based on existing levels of support. If employees who feel supported (high POS), organizations should allocate resources towards **informal socialization** such as **team integration** or **skill-building**.
- Investigate different types of POS (**emotional vs. instrumental**) interactions with socialization tactics in predicting policy awareness.
- The **moderation effect of POS may be specific to organizational structure**, such as formal policies and systems, rather than more individual-level outcomes like safety voice or knowledge.
 - Organizations should **prioritize clarity around policies**
 - Since POS moderates perceptions of formal systems, organizations should ensure that new employees not only **receive structured onboarding** but also **perceive genuine support from leadership**.
- When POS is high, employees may already feel confident in the organization's intentions and structures, making the added influence of structured socialization less necessary or noticeable—explaining the weaker relationship.

KEY POINT

Institutionalized socialization and perceived organizational support are both important to supporting newcomer safety knowledge and attitudes

Results

Moderation Results

	Unstandardized Coefficient	SE	t	p
Model 1: Socialization Tactics * POS → Needs Satisfaction (R² = .20)				
Socialization Tactics	0.15	0.153	4.05	<.001
POS	0.43	0.43	8.14	<.001
Socialization Tactics x POS	0.02	0.02	0.48	0.63
Model 2: Socialization Tactics * POS → Safety Voice (R² = .12)				
Socialization Tactics	0.06	0.03	2.01	0.045
POS	0.30	0.04	7.05	<.001
Socialization Tactics x POS	-0.03	0.04	-0.62	0.54
Model 3: Socialization Tactics * POS → Safety Knowledge (R² = .11)				
Socialization Tactics	0.13	0.03	4.52	<.001
POS	0.19	0.04	4.53	<.001
Socialization Tactics x POS	0.00	0.04	0.05	0.96
Model 4: Socialization Tactics * POS → Policies and Systems (R² = .11)				
Socialization Tactics	0.20	0.26	7.75	<.001
POS	0.19	0.04	5.14	<.001
Socialization Tactics x POS	-0.18	0.03	-5.15	<.001

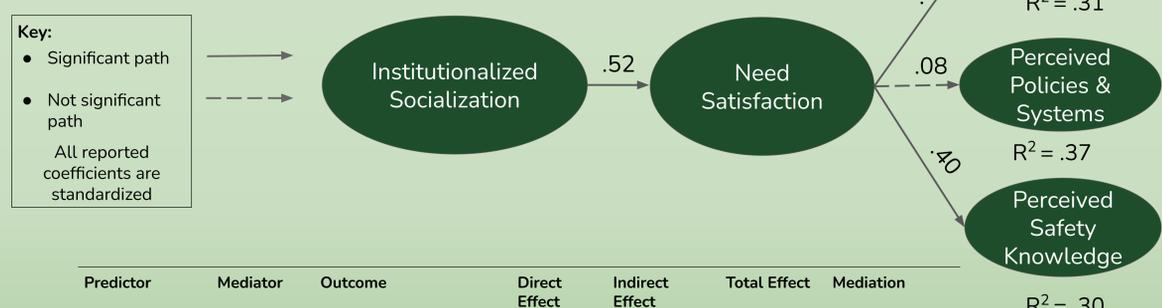
Interpretation:

- **Socialization** and **perceived organizational support** independently contribute to positive outcomes, but their **interactive effects are limited**.
- A **significant interaction** was found only for perceptions of policies and systems, where higher POS weakened the relationship between **institutionalized socialization tactics and outcome**.

Mediation Results

We tested need satisfaction as a mediator between socialization tactics and safety outcomes (safety voice, perceived policies and systems, and perceived safety knowledge) using a higher-order SEM.

Direct Effects:



Predictor	Mediator	Outcome	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	Mediation
Institutionalized Socialization	Need Satisfaction	Safety Voice	.18*	.23*	.41*	Partial
		Perceived Policies & Systems	.56*	.04	.60*	None
		Perceived Safety Knowledge	.22*	.20*	.42*	Partial

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