



Perceived Challenges When Changing Employer

What Newcomers Experience as Helpful During Organizational Entry

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Abstract: Joining a new employer is an exciting but also challenging experience. To learn more about new employees' transition into a new work environment, we interviewed newcomers in a medium-sized German IT service provider about the challenges they experienced during organizational entry and how onboarding helped them cope with these. Analyses revealed that participants predominantly experienced professional challenges. A combination of activities – especially social support and integration into everyday work – helped the new hires overcome the challenges they experienced. Findings also showed that opportunities to participate and contribute to the new work environment gain relevance as socialization progresses. These insights into newcomers' experiences may enable organizations to design an employee-centered onboarding strategy that contributes to newcomers' successful organizational socialization.

Keywords: organizational socialization, onboarding, employee perception, newcomer, longitudinal case study

Research Questions

Starting with a new employer may be challenging for new employees (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). Difficulties in understanding the new job duties as well as problems with social integration or finding one's feet in the new work context potentially hamper newcomers' organizational socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2014; Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016; Steinmacher et al., 2019). On the contrary, a successful start has the potential to foster stable employment relationships (Gupta et al., 2018) by contributing to newcomer orientation, relationship building in the new work environment, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Sharma & Stol, 2019). This benefits new employees just as much as it benefits employers, as increased retention rates of qualified personnel maximize recruitment success and, hence, lower search costs (Stanley, 2012). In terms of effective onboarding that helps new hires get started with their new employer, this study aims to identify perceived challenges during the onboarding process (organizational socialization; research question (RQ) 1) and appropriate onboarding initiatives to overcome such barriers (RQ 2). Furthermore, as existing research suggests that socialization experience may vary over time (Woodrow & Guest, 2020), it is investigated how newcomers' perception changes during organizational entry (RQ 3). Prolonged data collection over 6 months, via

semistructured interviews, reveals in-depth insights into the experiences and temporal aspects of newcomers during organizational socialization. Thus, the results contribute to a better understanding of how onboarding can help newcomers overcome challenges during organizational entry. This may also help sensitize employers to challenges during organizational socialization and allow them to derive practical indications for effective onboarding enhancing newcomers' organizational socialization.

Theoretical Considerations

The Concept of Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization describes the process by which new employees become familiar with and adapt to an organization's culture, values, norms, practices, and expectations (Holton, 1996; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This can be understood as a longer, ongoing process that focuses on integrating employees into the organizational culture and social structures and aims to align their behavior with the organization's values and norms. Hence, the core of organizational socialization is that newcomers "learn how things are done" (Kowtha, 2018, p. 89) to become active members of their new employer (Holton, 1996; Saks & Gruman, 2018).

Through several individual learning processes, newcomers approach the status of effectively functioning (Ashforth, 2012) and fully integrated organizational members (Bauer et al., 2007), and ultimately assume their designated role (van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This process of learning about and understanding one's new work environment and one's new job duties is referred to as organizational socialization. Such a goal-oriented mindset also underlies the term onboarding, which is often addressed in the context of organizational socialization (e.g. Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). However, there are some important differences between the two concepts: Onboarding refers to a set of rather short-term activities conducted to equip newcomers with mainly job-specific skills and knowledge in the first few weeks. Organizational socialization, in contrast, refers to the rather long-term learning and understanding processes triggered by these very (onboarding) activities. Consequently, onboarding serves to promote organizational socialization. Its focus on the initial phase with a new employer, however, makes perfect sense, as the following explanations demonstrate.

Challenges During Organizational Socialization

When a person first enters the organization, little or no prior knowledge about the new employer and work

environment make organizational socialization and the underlying learning processes particularly “intense and problematic” (Klein & Heuser, 2008, p. 280). Difficulties may be rooted in the uncertainty inherent in interaction between persons who do not know each other (uncertainty reduction theory: Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In addition, newcomers tend to draw on previous experiences with similar situations to reduce the initial lack of information (cognitive sense-making theory: Louis, 1980). However, in most cases, this information is only partially adequate to explain the conditions and events of the new work environment. Consequently, to master the critical phase of organizational entry, recently hired employees need to get familiar with (1) professional, (2) social, and (3) contextual aspects of their new work environment (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Bauer & Erdogan, 2014; Feldman, 1981; Holton, 1996; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Professional aspects of organizational socialization relate to the new role and include critical knowledge and skills, as well as a functional understanding of how the new job is performed. Social aspects refer to the interpersonal challenges within the new workplace, sometimes driven by the personality of the newcomer (intrapersonal level). Finally, contextual aspects comprise newcomers' understanding of and familiarizing with the organization's culture, work setting, and, if applicable, new private circumstances (see references in Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of potential challenges during organizational socialization

Main level	Sublevel	Potential challenges
Professional	—	Challenges at the professional level encompass deficits in knowledge and expertise required to perform the new job, as well as difficulties in understanding and applying one's new role, new processes, and organizational conventions (e.g., task mastery and role clarity: Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; role clarity: Lapointe et al., 2014; orientation: Sharma & Stol, 2019). Overall, such deficits may cause difficulties in fulfilling one's new job and may impede newcomers' organizational socialization. Unlike interpersonal challenges, professional challenges are rooted in the new job or the newcomer's job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities. Third parties are not involved.
Social	Interpersonal	Interpersonal challenges relate to difficulties in interacting and building relationships with actors in the new work environment. Such challenges can either relate purely to the social level or also affect job-related cooperation between the newcomer and the actors of his/her new work environment (e.g., workgroup integration: Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; affect-based trust to supervisor and coworkers: Lapointe et al., 2014; social acceptance: Bauer et al., 2007). Unlike professional challenges, interpersonal challenges always involve two or more parties.
	Intrapersonal	Intrapersonal challenges are rooted in the personality traits, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, values, and norms of the newcomer.
Contextual	Organizational culture	The newcomer has difficulty understanding, appropriately implementing, and/or identifying with the cultural norms in the new work environment. This may be rooted in a lack of information about the prevailing beliefs, orientations, values, and norms (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Kowtha, 2018) as well as desired behaviors in the new work environment (van Maanen & Schein, 1979). All of these components support newcomers' overall understanding of their new employer and serve to align their behaviors with the conventions of the new workplace (political knowledge: Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; role orientation: Saks et al., 2007).
	Work setting	The newcomer has difficulty settling into the new work organizational environment.
	Private sphere	Starting with a new employer has changed the newcomer's private context, resulting in additional effort for the newcomer.

Considering such diverse challenges and aiming to optimally support newcomers' organizational socialization process, it seems reasonable to start by identifying which challenges new employees perceive when starting with a new employer (RQ 1).

The Concept of Onboarding

Having identified the challenges new employees may get confronted with when joining a new organization, it is important to offer ways and resources to successfully address the challenges. To this end, employers can introduce onboarding. Onboarding encompasses "all formal or informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment" (Klein & Polin, 2012, p. 268). Such a bundle of activities guides organizations and newcomers during organizational entry and helps newcomers structure their experiences as they move through the socialization process (Klein & Heuser, 2008). Hence, the idea of onboarding is to support newcomers in resolving initial uncertainty, encourage sense-making, and provide all resources needed to perform the new role (Klein et al., 2015; Moon, 2018). Over the long term, onboarding can help strengthen the psychological bond between newcomers and the organization (Caldwell & Peters, 2018). In other words, onboarding describes the activities performed by an organization or its agents to foster newcomers' organizational socialization (Meyer & Bartels, 2017), whereas organizational socialization refers to the underlying processes (i.e., individual learning and understanding) that lead to newcomer integration into a new work environment (Klein & Polin, 2012).

Specific onboarding activities can be distinguished, for instance, according to their purpose, as suggested in Klein

and Heuser's inform-welcome-guide (IWG) model (2008, p. 319). Each category of the IWG model – respectively, the onboarding activities assigned to them – addresses certain needs of new employees that may arise from the challenges they perceive during organizational entry (see Table 2). Consequently, onboarding activities are potentially well suited to helping newcomers successfully overcome perceived challenges on joining a new organization. This argumentation can be considered comprehensible and appropriate. The difficulty rather seems to lie in correctly understanding the needs of newcomers and providing adequate support.

Findings on newcomers' perception of onboarding activities reveal how differently newcomers experience the onboarding activities offered by their new employer. For instance, some newcomers value and benefit most from early and formal onboarding (Klein et al., 2015); others prefer flexible structures that allow them to define their role within the new context (Sørdeide, 2016). Other studies illustrate that newcomers supplement onboarding activities to foster their organizational socialization. Especially coworkers and sometimes supervisors serve as valuable information resources, influencing newcomers' learning experiences, and thus contributing to a positive socialization experience (Harris et al., 2020; R. Korte & Lin, 2013; R. Korte et al., 2015; R. F. Korte, 2009; Mornata & Cassar, 2018). Networking initiatives (Fleming et al., 2016) and other processing strategies of influences from the new work environment, e.g., change of role, information seeking or interacting with others through befriending, negotiating or exchange (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012), can have a positive impact on newcomers' adjustment success.

While these findings demonstrate the complexity of newcomers' experience and provide some guidance for effective onboarding design, negative socialization experiences are hardly considered in the current body of

Table 2. Extended inform-welcome-guide model

Main category	Subcategory 1	Subcategory 2	Definition (adopted from Klein & Heuser, 2008, p. 319, for all onboarding categories)
Onboarding	Inform	Communication	Planned efforts to facilitate communication with newcomers. Includes both the provision of one-way messages and opportunities for two-way dialogs.
		Resources	Making materials or assistance available to new hires. These efforts differ from communication in that the new hire has to take the initiative to access them.
		Training	Planned efforts to facilitate the systematic acquisition of skills, behaviors, and knowledge.
	Welcome	Activities that provide opportunities for new hires to meet and socialize with other organizational members and/or celebrate the arrival of the newcomer.	
	Guide	Activities that provide a personal guide for each new hire.	
Individual efforts			In contrast to onboarding activities, individual efforts are initiated by the newcomer himself/herself. Often, they are based on the newcomer's personality or motivation. Contrary to resources, individual efforts do not rely on organizational capacities.
Other activities			All activities that helped the newcomer overcome perceived challenges and do not represent onboarding activities or individual efforts can be assigned to this category.

research. Woodrow and Guest (2020) recently showed that it is precisely negative experiences and the way employers deal with them that determine newcomers' organizational socialization. Aiming to address this potential of a bumpy start, the study at hand delivers detailed insights into how onboarding helps newcomers overcome perceived challenges during organizational socialization (RQ 2).

As mentioned at the beginning, organizational socialization is a long-term process that involves various organizational activities and individual efforts of the new employees. Given this complexity, the perception of organizational socialization conditions may vary over time (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). It is therefore worth considering onboarding activities at different points in time during the process of organizational socialization. Such longitudinal studies are needed to gain detailed understanding of how socialization success develops over time (Harris, 2023). By paying particular attention to temporal differences in new employees' socialization experiences (RQ 3), we aim to learn more about how newcomers' perceptions change during entry into an organization (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). Connecting socialization barriers with approved activities and resources to resolve them allows us to provide comprehensive information that will support organizations in improving their onboarding and consequently help newcomers overcome challenges during organizational entry. Specifically, by considering the temporal perspective, findings have the potential to contribute to newcomers' organizational socialization and help them to settle into their new roles more easily.

Research Design

Methodological Approach and Context of the Study

Overall, this study follows a postpositivist research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018) aiming to capture newcomers' perceptions of challenges during organizational socialization and supportive activities in dealing with them. Case studies are considered an appropriate method to gain an in-depth understanding of specific events and behavioral patterns – such as entry barriers and onboarding activities (Njie & Asimiran, 2014) – thus, contributing to determine potential cause and effect relations during newcomers' organizational socialization. Moreover, qualitative inquiry has proven to be suitable for capturing individual experiences and interpreting them in the context of individual life realities (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018), thus adding to a practice-oriented and empirically

driven knowledge base (Dul & Hak, 2008) approximating reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In this sense, the study was designed as a longitudinal embedded single case study (Yin, 2018) with the newcomers (embedded units of analysis) of a German medium-sized IT service provider (the case). The company employs around 450 employees and operates in the insurance industry as a full service provider of complex IT solutions. Customer orientation, innovation, and effectiveness are top priorities, resulting in high-performance requirements. Given the ongoing shortage of IT professionals (Bitkom, 2022) and two global competitors nearby, the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) is struggling to attract and retain qualified personnel. Such framework conditions and organizational characteristics are representative of the German IT SME sector. By initiating the scientific collaboration, the IT service provider intended to improve its onboarding to give its newcomers a smooth start and thereby lay the foundation for long-term employment relationships.

Instrument

Since interviews “are particularly helpful for providing thick descriptions of events and at least their short-term consequences” (Ashforth, 2012, p. 163), we decided to encourage new employees in semistructured interviews to report how they perceived organizational socialization at their new employer [the interview questions used are available in Table E1 in the Electronic Supplementary Material (ESM 1)]. At three points in time, participants were asked in chronological order (Small & Cook, 2023) to report what onboarding activities they experienced (Interview Topic 1), what challenges they faced during their organizational entry (Interview Topic 2), and whether the onboarding activities described in the interview, any other activities, or the participants themselves contributed to overcoming the perceived challenges (Interview Topic 3). Capturing newcomers' experiences in several small steps seemed reasonable because shorter intervals between the event of interest and data collection reduce any recall bias (Rausch, 2014) and thus increase findings' validity. Furthermore, “a research design and research process that enables prolonged engagement with the research context will be more likely to offer a rigorous answer to the questions posed” (Anderson, 2017, p. 130), allowing for a precise mapping of participants' reality.

Sampling and Data Collection

Following the purposeful sampling method (Palinkas et al., 2015), exclusively new employees were invited to participate

Table 3. Sample characteristics

Participant	Field of activity	Sex		Age (in years)					Professional experience						Description ^a	Fit ^b	
		M	F	≤25	26-30	31-40	41-50	>50	In years								
									None	<5	5-10	11-20	21-30	>30			Related to new job duties
P01	IT-related	x						x							x	Job duties are partly familiar and partly new. Has extensive experience with two products (30 and 6 years).	High
P02	Support services		x		x										x	Has a basic technical understanding because she previously managed the same job duties operationally for 4 years. Now she manages them strategically from a higher hierarchical level.	Moderate
P03	IT-related		x		x										x	Has worked with the same technology for 6 months but has no industry experience.	Low
P04	Support services		x				x								x	Has 20 years of industry experience and has managed the same product from a different perspective for 5 years.	Moderate
P05	IT-related		x				x								x	Was for 14 years an all-rounder in the current subject area and for now holds a specialist role.	High
P06	IT-related		x					x							x	Has 10 years of experience in the actual field of activity.	High
P07	IT-related		x				x								x	Has previously performed identical job duties for approx. 6 years. However, the organization's infrastructure and the technologies used are new.	High
P08	IT-related		x				x								x	Knows the software that has been being supported for 8 years and has as much experience coordinating tasks.	High
P09	IT-related		x					x							x	Has little industry experience but has performed the same job duties for 2.5 years.	High
P10	IT-related		x				x								x	Has worked in organizations of comparable size for 16 years and knows the software that has been being supported for 10 years. Her specific job duties, in contrast, are new.	Moderate
Total		5	5	—	5	3	1	1	—	2	3	3	1	1			

Note. M = male, F = female. ^a Participant-specific summary of all statements on the professional experience of the respective newcomer. The statements were coded as either responses to interview topic four in the first interview or elsewhere in the three interviews if they referred to the newcomer's professional experience. ^b Indicates how well a newcomer's professional experience matches the new job (high = previous professional activities correspond fully or to a large extent to the new job duties, moderate = previous professional activities partly overlap with the new job duties, low = no or only basic professional experience related to the new job duties).

in the study. Potential participants were informed about the study through an e-mail from the HR department of the IT service provider. In this e-mail, it was explicitly stated that participation was voluntary and that responses would be processed anonymously. A total of 13 newcomers were willing to participate, with only 10 participants engaging in all three interviews, thus constituting the sample (for sample characteristics, see Table 3). Most of the newcomers were hired to perform IT-related activities such as programming and development. The gender ratio is balanced. Half of the sample is between age 26 and 30 years. All participants reported having professional experience, although to varying degrees and with varying relevance to the new job. Although the sample is rather small, it can be considered appropriate in view of the research objectives, methodology, and context of the study. Moreover, thematic saturation emerged during data analysis, which can be considered another indicator toward an acceptable sample (Guest et al., 2006; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Hence, findings of the 30 in-depth interviews (three interviews per participant) may adequately contribute to knowledge on organizational socialization and coping strategies for perceived challenges during this phase.

Once a newcomer agreed to participate, the three interviews were collected over a total data collection period of 6 months. In the beginning, all interviews took place in face-to-face meetings with the first author of this paper. Later, we switch to telephone interviews due to contact restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (Mayring, 2014). In total, 17.5 h of interview material was collected, with single interviews lasting from about 19 min to about 1 h.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with MaxQDA 2022 applying the structuring content analysis according to Mayring (2014). Thereby, deductive as well as inductive analysis procedures were used. Answering the first research question on perceived challenges of joining a new employer started with the development of a coding manual (see Table E2 in ESM 1).

Its categories were derived from the empirical findings on the challenges of changing employers (deductive category assignment) allowing to summarize newcomers' statements in overarching themes. In several material runs, two coders repeatedly compared and refined the codes with each other and finally completed the coding manual with examples from the interview data. The codes of the final material run show satisfactory intercoder

reliability with a Cohen's κ coefficient of 0.84 (Hsu & Field, 2003; Landis & Koch, 1977). Answering the second research question started with coding conducive activities to overcome the perceived challenges during organizational socialization using the categories of the IWG model (see Table 2, again deductive category assignment). For statements that did not fit into the IWG categories, the coders extended the model by new categories (inductive category formation allowing to capture new aspects). Both coders performed several material runs and discussed differences in the coding until a complete agreement was reached. Finally, to investigate whether and how newcomers' perception changes during organizational entry (RQ 3), participants' statements for each of the three interview appointments were compared.

Findings

RQ 1: Which Challenges Do Newcomers Perceive When Starting With a New Employer?

Overall, newcomers perceived 20 different challenges during their organizational entry, which they reported in 27 statements (see Figure 1). Newcomers' experiences related to all three levels of organizational socialization. Professional challenges were most frequently addressed (13 statements). Within this category, participants described subject-related challenges due to the new subject area and tasks (seven statements) and procedural challenges due to the new tools and technical infrastructure (two and one statements, respectively), the new job-related processes (two statements), or the lack of knowledge about connections between the organizational units (one statement). Social and contextual challenges were perceived considerably less frequently (six and eight statements, respectively). On the social level, getting to know the new colleagues and the way of communicating and working with them presented an initial hurdle (one statement each: interpersonal challenges). Moreover, finding patience for the socialization process (two statements) and dealing with the responsibility gained in the new job (one statement) were reported as intrapersonal challenges. Regarding contextual challenges, some newcomers, for instance, needed a bit of time to familiarize with the setup and equipment of the new work setting (two and one statements, respectively). The same applied in one case each to the new organizational culture and the new city to which a newcomer had to move for his new job.

Overall, for research question one, it can be stated that newcomers to the IT service provider most frequently

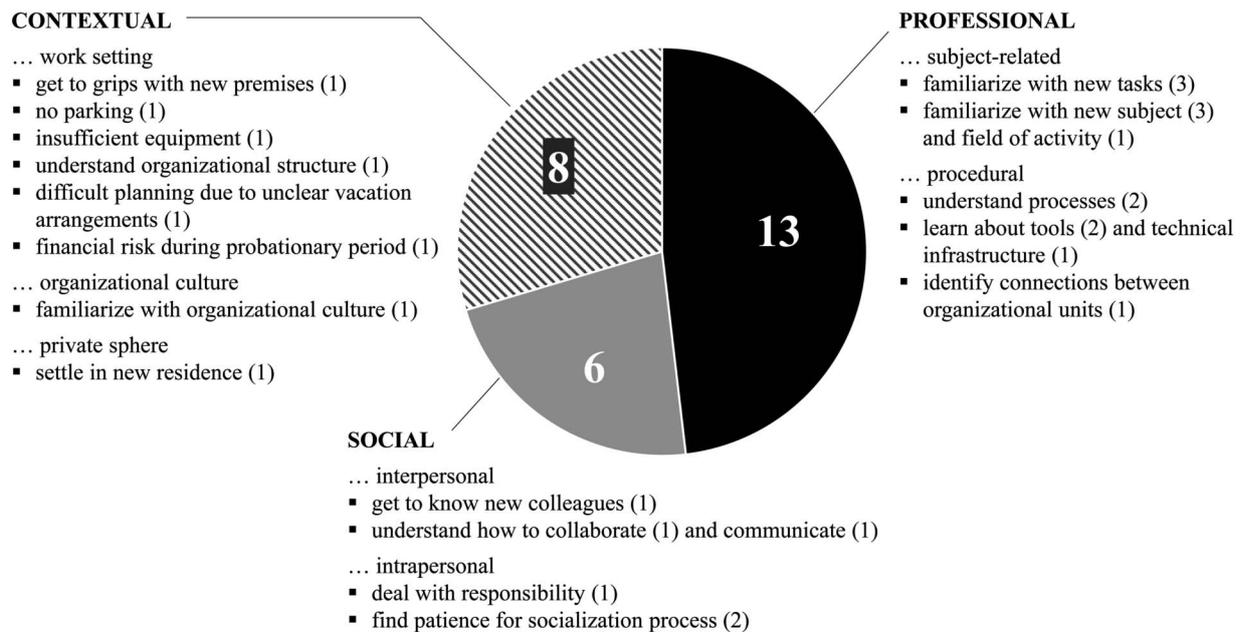


Figure 1. Total counts of newcomers' statements on perceived challenges during organizational entry.

perceived professional challenges during their organizational entry. Social and contextual challenges were also mentioned but occurred comparatively seldom.

RQ 2: How Does Onboarding Help Newcomers Overcome Perceived Challenges During Organizational Entry?

In total, participants named 152 activities that helped them overcome the challenges perceived when starting with their new employer (see Table 4). More than half of the statements (86 statements) fell into the categories of the IWG model according to Klein and Heuser (2008). *Resources* was by far the most frequently addressed category (58 statements), especially support from new colleagues (44 statements). In addition, participants described *Individual efforts* as conducive to dealing with the challenges during organizational entry (27 statements), i.e., for instance, writing documentation or using the internet to research information (three statements each). Finally, the subcategories *Integration into everyday work* and *Learning by doing* were comparably often described as helpful in dealing with perceived challenges (14 and 17 statements, respectively). Participants' perceived relevance of such other activities in dealing with perceived challenges during organizational entry led us to describe Klein and Heuser's original model as the extended IWG (EIWG) model.

Looking at the different types of perceived challenges, it is striking that most of the mentioned activities helped overcome professional challenges – especially subject-

related challenges (99 and 63 statements, respectively). Regarding social and contextual challenges, considerably fewer activities were described as helpful (24 and 29 statements, respectively). This distribution also applies to the average number of helpful activities per perceived challenge. Most activities were mentioned as helpful in dealing with professional challenges (7.6 statements per challenge; 4.0 and 3.6 statements per social and contextual challenge, respectively). Thus, a bias due to the number of challenges mentioned per challenge type can be negated.

During data analyses, evidence emerged that one activity usually contributed to overcoming multiple organizational entry challenges. Furthermore, it became evident that one challenge could usually be overcome with the help of several activities. The organizational entry experiences of participant P10 exemplify these findings well: P10 described challenges at all three levels of organizational socialization. Familiarizing with the new subject matter (subject-related) and lacking patience to learn the ropes (intrapersonal) caused initial discomfort just as finding one's way around the new premises and the break room facilities (work setting). Successfully dealing with these challenges was predominantly due to the support of P10's new colleagues. "The team being supportive helped and still helps [to] deal with these challenges." Colleagues were a reliable resource for P10, providing a sense of safety during her early days with the new employer, because for her, "the most important thing is that [she] has someone [she] can turn to." For three of the four challenges P10 perceived, she identified a combination of activities as helpful in overcoming them. For instance, learning about the new topic was

Table 4. Perceived challenges during organizational entry and activities conducive to overcoming them

Activities	Perceived challenges (main level and sublevel)							Total number of statements	
	Professional		Social		Contextual				
	Subject-related	Procedural	Interpersonal	Intrapersonal	Organizational culture	Work setting	Private sphere		
Inform									
Communication	2	1	—	—	—	1	1	5	86
Resources	24	19	1	5	2	6	1	58	
Training	9	3	—	2	—	3	—	17	
Welcome	—	—	1	—	—	1	—	2	
Guide	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	4	
Individual efforts	11	7	1	3	—	4	1		27
Other									
Integration in work	3	2	2	3	2	2	—	14	39
Learning by doing	10	3	1	2	1	—	—	17	
Team event	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	
Professional experience	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	
Single mentions	—	—	2	—	—	2	—	4	
Total number of statements	63	36	8	16	5	20	4		152
	99		24		29				

facilitated by exchanging with colleagues and a handover list prepared by her predecessor (resources). At the same time, different training activities, such as the introductory seminar, job shadowing, and several pieces of training from her predecessor, promoted P10's progress regarding the new topic. Complementing this, P10 wrote documentation to "check back everything now and then" what she has already learned (individual efforts). "What also help[ed]," added P10, "[was] to do one thing at a time." This acceptance of a gradual learning phase (individual efforts), which P10 described in the second interview, also compensated for her initial lack of patience. Finally, P10 described "the daily doing" as helpful in getting into the new subject matter. By working on her own (learning by doing), P10 soon recognized "that it got better and [she] got a little bit of an overview; gaps kept closing and things became full circle."

Comparably to P10, the other newcomers, too, repeatedly described multiple activities, mostly from different categories of the EIWG model, as conducive to overcoming one or more perceived challenges during their organizational entry with the IT service provider. Hence, research question two can be answered as follows: Newcomers perceived a variety of activities that helped them overcome the perceived challenges during organizational entry. These activities address all categories of the IWG model, whereby support from colleagues was most frequently cited as helpful (resources). In addition to the IWG

categories, all participants described individual efforts as well as integration in everyday work and learning by doing as helpful. Furthermore, it was striking that the newcomers mostly described one activity as helpful in overcoming several challenges. One challenge was usually overcome with a combination of several activities.

RQ 3: How Does Newcomers' Perception Change During Organizational Entry?

As shown in Figure 2, newcomers' perceptions of supportive activities to overcome perceived barriers to entry varied over time. In the first interview, organizational efforts (summarized with the dashed frame) dominated across all types of challenge. Especially "resources" were mentioned often. In the second and third interviews, newcomers' perception of "resources" and the IWG categories overall steadily decreased. On the contrary, "individual efforts" as well as "integration in everyday work" and "learning by doing" increased over time (the latter two are summarized with the bold frame). This development seems reasonable, as newcomers need some time to familiarize themselves with the new work environment before they can act independently within the scope of their new job duties.

Looking at the three types of challenges separately, it is noticeable that most supportive activities have been

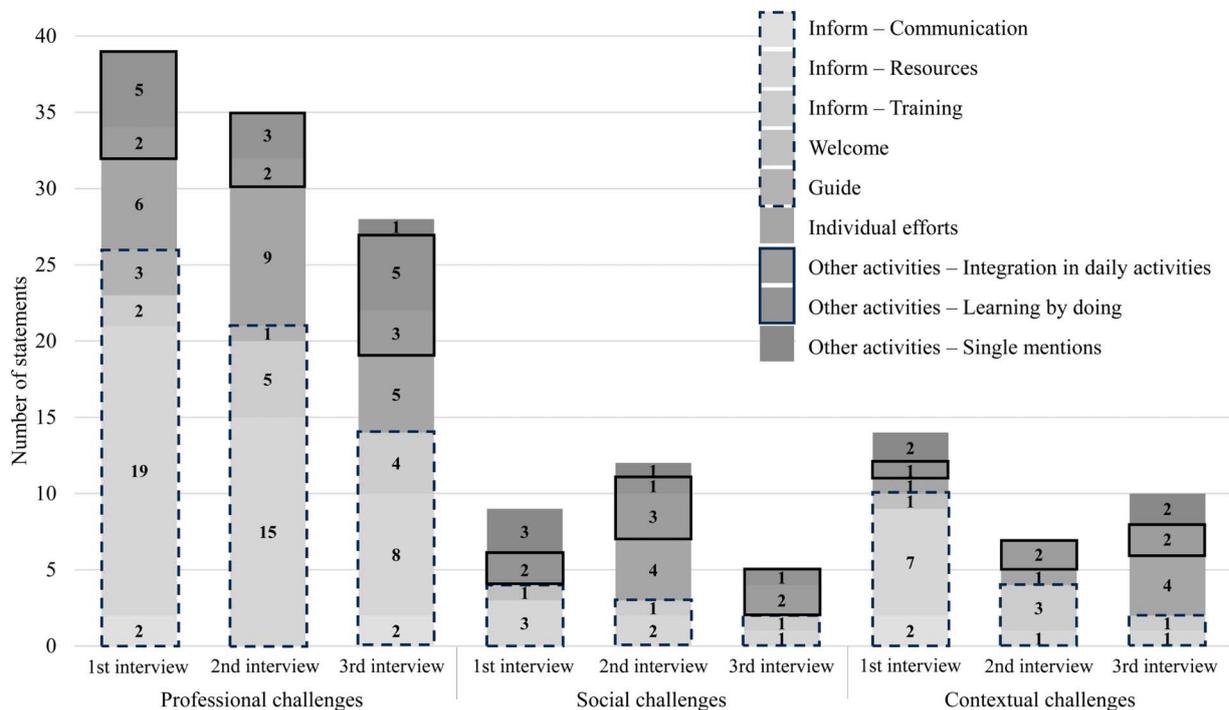


Figure 2. Activities conducive to overcoming perceived challenges across the first 6 months after organizational entry.

perceived to be conducive to overcoming professional challenges. At the same time, however, “individual efforts” increased as socialization progressed – especially “integration into everyday work” and “learning by doing” became more prominent. To overcome social challenges, slightly more support activities were named in the second interview. As expected, “individual efforts” and “integration into everyday work” were helpful in this regard. Finally, in terms of contextual challenges, the most conducive activities were mentioned shortly after organizational entry (1st Interview). Here, participants mostly named organizational efforts – in particular “resources” – as helpful to get along with the new situation.

Taken together, it can be stated for research question three, that newcomers’ perception concerning supportive activities to overcome challenges on starting with a new employer varies as organizational socialization proceeds. Over time, individual efforts, integration into everyday work, and learning by doing become more relevant in solving initial hurdles. Organizational efforts – as represented by the IWG model – in contrast are more relevant right after organizational entry and then fade out.

Discussion and Conclusion

This case study dealt with newcomers’ perceptions of challenges during organizational entry and conducive activities to overcome these challenges. Analyses revealed that the newcomers under consideration experienced professional challenges more often than social and contextual hurdles. Furthermore, all newcomers reported a combination of activities that facilitated their organizational entry. It was striking that organizational efforts were rather perceived at the beginning of newcomers’ organizational socialization, while individual efforts gained relevance as socialization progressed. Consequently, Klein and Heuser’s IWG model (2008) fell short in supporting newcomers’ successful start with their new employer. Rather, it had to be expanded to include newcomers’ individual efforts, their integration into everyday work, and their uptake of the new job duties as conducive practice to facilitate organizational socialization.

Findings confirm existing evidence on the relevance of newcomers’ colleagues for organizational socialization (Harris et al., 2020), learning by doing as an effective learning strategy (Billett, 2022) as well as newcomers’ influence as active cocreators of the socialization process (e.g., Bauer et al., 2019). Beyond that, the longitudinal research design revealed that newcomers’ perception of conducive socialization efforts changes over time. In conclusion, this case study’s findings guide employers in

designing an employee-centered socialization plan that is adapted to newcomers’ varying needs and acknowledges individual activity as well as employer-led efforts.

When interpreting the results, it is important to keep in mind that the findings are based on self-reports from 10 newcomers to one organization. Self-reporting can be biased mainly by memory effects and socially desirable response patterns. Therefore, further data collection with newcomers in other organizations and, optimally, with other actors involved in the socialization process, such as colleagues of the newcomers, is needed to substantiate the findings and provide a more comprehensive picture of any challenges during organizational entry and the new hires’ socialization progress. Cross-checking newcomers’ perception may reveal hygiene factors (introduced by Herzberg and colleagues; Sachau, 2007) that newcomers do not explicitly name but consider to be conducive to their entry. Finally, a research design, applying digital survey formats could reduce influences through researcher interaction and allow for shorter survey intervals (e.g., via digital diaries).

In conclusion, the findings argue for offering a mixed set of organizational onboarding activities and opportunities for individual participation, from which newcomers can always choose those they find most conducive to a certain need during their start with a new employer. Moreover, newcomers’ colleagues should be prepared for their role during organizational socialization so that new employees receive optimal support right from the start. Finally, regular feedback provided to and solicited from the newcomer can help intervene in the socialization process as needed.

Electronic Supplementary Material

The following electronic supplementary material is available with this article at <https://doi.org/10.1027/1866-5888/a000342>

ESM 1. Interview questions and coding manual

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