

Information Adequacy during Organization Assimilation Process in Thai Organization

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Asian Conference on Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which newcomers within Thai organization find each of several categories of organizationally-relevant information adequacy during the process of organizational assimilation. Participants in the study were 247 “new” employees at Bangkok Bank. Bangkok Bank considers employees whose length of stay with the bank has been less than 18 months as new employees. Questionnaires were administered to all of the Bank’s new employees to obtain the data for this study. A t-test was used to analyze the data. The data were summed and coded by using Statistical Package for Social Science.

In all probability, the explanation for this finding rests the fact that all newcomers go through a training prior to starting their jobs. Thus, all newcomers receive the same basic information concerning the organizations as well as a measure of job-relevant information. Banking operations tend to be routine and systematic. Employees know their duties very well. So, with a standard orientation provided, all relatively new employees might very well find themselves on an equal footing. Information does not vary as a function of previous work experience.

Keywords: Information Adequacy, Organization Assimilation

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Introduction

Thousands of people begin with new jobs and assume new organizational roles, yet very little is known about the process by which new role incumbents become assimilated into an organization. Curiously, although the efforts of newcomers to proactively reduce uncertainty in their work environments are of obvious importance to their successful organizational assimilation, the means by which newcomers seek information has received scant research attention. (Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1985, Miler & Jablin, 1991). This study provides an examination of newcomers within Thai organization find each of several categories of organizationally-relevant information adequacy. During an assimilation process, newcomers seek information in order to adjust themselves to their organization's culture. Newcomers need information to reduce their uncertainties regarding organizational entry.

Although most organizational researchers acknowledge that individual and situational factors have an effect on successful organizational entry, few have generated theories on research assimilation as a process involving both influences. One notable exception has been the theory building and research by Jones (1983, 1986) who argued for an interactionist approach to explain the socialization experience. Falcion and Wilson (1988) suggest that the interactionist approach, which views the reciprocal impact of the newcomer's psychological orientation and organization influence as antecedents to successful socialization, best explains current notions of the assimilation process. Although this approach effectively explains the impact of individual and situation elements, the interactionist perspective fails to clarify the function and outcomes of communication in the entry process. Unless resulting communication behavior can be identified, explained, and based on an established communication theory, such a perspective remains incomplete and inadequate as a conceptualization of the dynamic process of organizational assimilation (Gorden, Mignerey, & Rubin, 1995). Commonly explanations of the assimilation process have focused on those issues thought to influence the communication between a superior and his/her subordinate.

During the past several years, there has been growing interest in how newcomers obtain information during the encounter period of assimilation. Research has found that effective information acquisition is related to assimilation outcomes such as satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Morrison, 1993a; Ostroff, & Kozlowski, 1992). These findings notwithstanding, the existing research on newcomer information acquisition leaves many questions unanswered. This is because the issue of information acquisition has been approached from several different frameworks, such that there is not a generally accepted typology of the information that newcomers must acquire. Further, have focused almost on newcomer information seeking and have paid relatively little attention to the unsolicited information that newcomers receive. Another issue that has been neglected is the perceived usefulness of various types of information.

The objective of study

The research sought to determine the extent to which newcomers within Thai organization find each of several categories of organizationally-relevant information adequacy.

Statement of the problem

This study tries to address the problem of the assimilation newcomers into Thai organizations. There might be many problems that newcomers do not understand and they experience as they try to adjust themselves to an organization. The assimilation process in an organization has a major influence on the performance of individuals, and thus affects group and organizational performance as well. Regardless of whether it is consciously planned and managed or whether it occurs informally, assimilation provides newcomers with considerable information about appropriate roles and behaviors. Assimilation is the process of what referred to as “learning the ropes.”

While few would deny that the assimilation process is part of organizational life, the specific relationship between assimilation activities and subsequent employee attitudes not well known. Louis (1980) suggests that when newcomers enter an organization they are faced with learning a new culture. Newcomers must assimilate the unofficial rules for sorting, labeling, and interpreting experience in the organization. These unwritten rules provide important clues for how to become an effective organizational member.

Thai organizations spend a great deal of time and money to orient new employees. Usually the direct costs for indoctrination program as substantial. However, there are indirect costs as well. For example, newcomers generally work below capacity while they learn their jobs and adjust to their new surrounding. The possibility of reducing costs provides an important incentive for organizations to learn about ways to improve orientation and assimilation programs.

Most interaction in organizations involve information seeking. Researchers have taken the position that information seeking is particularly important and somewhat unique during organizational entry. Organizational entry might represent the most critical time of employee role learning. The ease and quickness with which newcomers learn their role are likely to affect their relationships with members of their role set and have an impact on their career path. At the same time, newcomers are likely to experience considerably higher levels of role-related and career uncertainty when entering a new environment than at any other time during their organization tenure.

In addition, newcomers in comparison to old-timers are likely to seek information in relatively more “mindful” as opposed to “mindless” ways (Langer, 1978, p. 36-38). In other words, their heightened sense of uncertainty leads newcomers (1) to be conscious of value and behavior to be learned and (2) to often think about what they do not know and how to obtain the information they desire. As a consequence, when individuals are new to an organization they might seek information in a far more deliberate manner than when they have grown accustomed to their organizational environment (Asford & Cummings, 1985).

This study will provide Thai organizations with more information adequacy concerning the effectiveness of types of information. And the readers of this study will understand more about the important role of information adequacy toward newcomers as part of the assimilation process.

A. Organization Assimilation

Organization assimilation is the process by which individuals become integrated into an organization (Jablin, 1982). Organization assimilation can be viewed as a process which take place during the first weeks and months of a newcomer's organizational experience. Graen's (1976) model of role making processes in organizations views assimilation in this way. Briefly, this model asserts that the jobs which organizations fill are typically the product of incomplete programs which must be completed or defined by the organization's participants. Organizational assimilation refers to the process by which organization members become part of, or are absorbed into, the culture of an organization. This process is perhaps best known as organizational "role taking" (Katz & Kahn, 1966) or organizational "role making" (Graen, 1976).

Organizational assimilation consists of attempts by organizational agents to teach newcomers and attempts to learn about their role in the organization. During the encounter stage of assimilation, which occurs during the weeks and months immediately following entry, newcomers must learn about the requirements of their jobs, about the expectations associated with their jobs, about the expectations associated with their roles, and about the organization in general (Jablin, 1987). For this process to succeed, newcomers need to obtain information (Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a).

B. The information that newcomers need/ Information seeking

Upon entering an organization, newcomer typically experience some degree of surprise (Louis, 1980) or role shock (Van Maanen, 1975). Faced with learning the formal and informal requirements of a new role within the organization, this boundary passage event is often associated with high levels of uncertainty. Information transmitted from various organizational sources during the entry or encounter stage (Van Maanen, 1975) of organizational assimilation is intended to help newcomers cope with the surprise and the uncertainty they might experience. In particular, messages from management, supervisors, and co-worker during the encounter period are usually designed to clarify newcomers' roles, to indoctrinate newcomers to organizational practices, to ease newcomers into membership in their work groups, and to help newcomers begin to develop new self-image, in keeping with their new roles and organizations (Jablin, 1978).

Despite an organization's attempts to provide newcomers with information that is relevant to their new roles, there might be inadequacies in the nature and scope of the information presented. In fact, one study has shown that, during the encounter period, newcomers perceive that they receive less information from those around them than they believe is needed (Jablin, 1984). Sources of information adequacy might be found in the passing of a honeymoon period (Ziller, 1965).

Old-timers who might have once gone out of their way to make newcomers feel like guests and who were open sources of inside knowledge can gradually become closed to newcomers' inquiries.

Information inadequacy can also stem from the newcomer's inability to interpret (i.e. decode) messages sent by incumbents. Though incumbents might intend that their messages be helpful, newcomers might instead experience overload (i.e., receive more messages than can be processed), have an insufficient context-specific dictionary by which to decipher jargon, and/or be unable to discriminate between "ambient" and "discretionary" messages (Jablin, 1987, p. 694). Thus, newcomers who experience information decoding problems might need assistance in recalling, clarifying, amplifying, or discounting received messages.

During the encounter phase of organizational assimilation, newcomers depend upon information from others for developing role clarity. Although newcomers receive role-relevant information, the information they receive is frequently perceived as inadequate; hence, they usually experience fairly high levels of uncertainty (Jablin, 1982; Salanick & Pfeffer, 1978). This uncertainty is reflected in the level of role ambiguity and role conflict which newcomers experience and is of importance because it can have an impact on employees' job satisfaction productivity, and ultimately, job tenure (Asford & Cummings, 1985; Jackson & Schuler, 1985). Thus, it is no surprise that newcomers are often advised to reduce their uncertainty by "seeking out the help and information they need to do their work effectively instead of waiting or wishing for their bosses to provide it" (Katz, 1985, p. 122).

C. Information Adequacy

Information Adequacy represents the actual amount of information accurately understood by a given group of organization members, plus their perceptions of whether they feel adequately informed (Redding, 1972). A cloud hanging over this issue concerns what organization members ought to be told. Usually decisions about what employees should know are made by top management of the organization. However, when lower-level employees report that the information they receive is inadequate, those decisions are made by the employees themselves (Wayne, 1983). In any case information adequacy depends on some definition of what information ought to be known.

In a research program on measuring the effectiveness of employee communications conducted at South Illinois University, Bateman and Miller (1979) reported developing the following list of topics on which employees might like to be informed:

- Fringe benefit
- Division products
- Employee hobbies
- News about company
- Cartoons and jokes
- How division products are used
- Employee recreational news
- Charity funds and drives
- Departmental features
- Saving bonds programs
- Business trends affecting company
- All products
- Executive promotions
- Employee safety
- News about retirees
- How company products are used
- Compensation
- New or improved products
- Sales progress
- Free enterprises system

Bateman and Miller (1979) also developed a checklist of subjects that employees might like to discuss with their supervisors. That list included

- Machine or job-related problems
- Time off
- State of the division
- Potential layoffs
- Performance evaluation
- Procedures
- Fringe benefits
- The company in general
- Overtime
- Tools and equipment
- Income order
- Vacation time
- Plant or office procedures
- How well the employee is doing
- Pay and pay increases

Whether these are the best areas and the kinds of information that an employee ought to know which has not been answered by any research reported at this time. The issue seems to be substantial one for organizations because, as Bateman and Miller (1979), “if each employee really mastered all the communications humming about him, he would have precious little time for anything else but that” (p. 22).

Nevertheless, the general rule seems to be one of downward communication, at least as far as information adequacy is measured by actual information tests (Redding, 1972)

Information is a key to the reduction of uncertainty. Organization members usually are concerned with the adequacy of this information (Daniels & Spiker, 1987). Farance, Monge, and Russell (1977) contended "What is known in an organizational and who knows it is obviously very important in determining the overall functioning of the organization" (p. 27)". France et al. explained problems associated with information adequacy by employing Brillouin's (1962) distinction between absolute and distributed information. Absolute information refers to the total body of information that exists within an organization at any time. This information is distributed to the extent that it is diffused throughout the organization. Information adequacy problems might arise because a piece of information simply does not exist in the organization's pool of absolute information or because existing information is not properly distributed.

Daniels and Spiker (1994) observe that several studies have sought to measure information adequacy with a scale developed by the International Communication Association (ICA). This scale asks organization members to report the extent to which they are adequately informed on the following topics:

1. How well I am doing my job
2. My job duties
3. Organizational policies
4. Pay and benefits
5. How technological changes affect my job
6. Mistakes and failures of the organization
7. How I am being judged
8. How job-related problems are being handled
9. How organization decisions are made that affect my job
10. Promotion and advancement opportunities in my organization
11. Important new product, service, or program developments in my organization
12. How my job related to the total organization
13. Specific problems faced by management

While research has linked information adequacy only implicitly with participation in organizations (Sanborn's study & Tompkin's study as cited in Daniels & Spiker, 1983), there are studies that provide explicit rationales for the role of information adequacy as an indicator of participation (Daly, Falcione, & Damhorst, 1979; Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, & Lesniak, 1978). However, information adequacy has been operationalized in various ways. For example, one definition considers members' specific levels of knowledge about the organization and its policies. Studies employing knowledge tests usually focus upon the gap between absolute and distributed information, frequently finding that members' knowledge levels are inadequate by the customary standards of objective measurement (Farance, Monge, & Russell, 1977). Other studies involving knowledge tests explore the relationship between information adequacy and indices of satisfaction. Tompkins (as cited in Daniels & Spiker, 1994), for example, found a high positive correlation between knowledge levels and satisfaction with communication.

A second operationalization of information adequacy measures organization members' judgments about how well they are informed (i.e., perceived adequacy of information) rather than their levels of specific knowledge about the organization. Sanborn's study (as cited in Daniels & Spiker, 1983) used this approach in a study which found no relationship between communication satisfaction and morale, as well as a negative relationship between communication satisfaction and upward communication freedom.

Goldhaber et al. (1978) reported results of research based on the ICA Communication Audit and involving over 3,600 persons in 16 organizations. This research operationalized information adequacy in terms of the perceptions organization members had of how much information they receive about specific job and organization matters. Data also indicated that organization members receive and want to receive more information related to their immediate work environment than information related to the organization as a whole. While studies of information adequacy generally have been concerned with the potential impact of adequacy on variables such as satisfaction, the most recent work has attempted to identify the conditions under which organization members perceive themselves to be adequately informed (Daniels & Spiker, 1994). Alexander, Helms, and Curran (1987) found that levels of communication with supervisor, administrative sources, and peers are greater for members who perceived themselves to be adequately informed. Inadequately informed members also were younger than more adequately informed members, and they had been employed with the organization for less time.

All of the work here has been conducted in Western organizations. This study provides a shift in focus as this research was conducted in a Thai organization. Specifically, the study examined whether there is a difference in perceived information adequacy among newcomers who have different levels of work experience.

Hypothesis of the study

There will be a difference in perceived information adequacy among newcomers who are conceivably at different points in the assimilation process based on their length of association with the organization.

Methodology

This particular research, with its focus on employee perceptions of the process of organizational assimilation, required access to a moderately large number of new or relatively new employees. One option was to survey new employees across a wide range of organizations. That option would clearly provide for a diversity in employee experiences and perspectives. However, there would be a myriad of differences born of the size of each organization, the presence or absence of formal employee training programs, the presence or absence of mentoring relationships.

In essence, the very diversity that might constitute an advantage would make the task of drawing conclusions complex and difficult indeed. Thus, a second option—that of using a case study approach by focusing data collection on employee experiences within a single organization was deemed preferable.

A. Sample

The sample in this study was obtained through systematic random sampling procedures. The researcher obtained a list of new employees from the personal department of Bangkok Bank and selected 300 employees who had worked no more than 18 months in each department. Bangkok Bank considers employees whose length of stay with the bank has been less than 18 months as “new” employees. The research asked for assistance from head of the personal department of Bangkok Bank in identifying eligible employees and in distributing the questionnaires. The respondents for this study were all considered permanent employees of the Bank.

B. Demographic Information Analysis

A total of 247 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 82.5%. Generally, the sample characteristics were compatible with the characteristic of the population. Most of respondents are female ($n = 135$; 54.7%), between 26 and 39 years of age ($n = 169$; 68.4%), with a monthly salary ranging from 10,001 baht to 15,000 baht ($n = 142$; 57.5%). Their modal education is a bachelor's degree ($n = 235$; 95.1%). Only 11 of them carry a master's degree. In terms of work experience, most of the respondents ($n = 151$; 61.1%) reported that, at the time of this study, they worked for The Bank for 16 months to 18 months.

C. Data gathering instrument

The questionnaire focused on information adequacy that organization members' perceptions of the adequacy of information received. The 13-items scale asked respondents to report the extent to which new employees believed themselves to be adequately informed on several topics (Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979). The scale ranges from 1 to 5, by which 1 means “very little”, 2 means “little”, 3 means “some”, 4 means “great”, 5 means “greatly.” Means scores of “low level” range from 1-2, “moderate level” ranges from 3, and “high level” ranges from 4 to 5. Goldhaber and his colleagues have tested each section of this questionnaire extensively. The reported reliability of the subscale is .88 (Downs, 1988). Downs also reports the discriminant reliability as 100 percent.

Reliability test was conducted for the scale to investigate the internal consistency among the items. Alpha coefficients were .8532 for Information adequacy scale. The pretest results indicated that the information adequacy scale was sufficiently reliable for use in the actual study. This testing also revealed that there was no cultural differences serving to on validate the questionnaire. The translated questionnaire could be employed in Thailand.

A t-test was performed in order to test whether differences in information adequacy are affected by the levels of work experience. The minimum sample size needed is approximately 33 for a correlation at .08. The researcher estimated effect size for this project as .50 with alpha level at .05 and two levels of work experience (Aron & Aron, 1997).

Result

The hypothesis is predicted that there will be a difference in perceived information adequacy among newcomers who are conceivably at different points in the assimilation process based on their length of association with the organization. The questionnaire had asked respondents to mark one of five time frameworks as representing their level of association with the Bank. Given the range of work experience represented by the respondents in this research (specifically 3 months to 18 months), ideally, the researcher would have created a minimum of three, if not five, comparison groups. Unfortunately, the distribution of work experience in evidence did not warrant such an approach. Probably as an artifact of the economic conditions impacting Thailand at the times of this research, two groups of respondents were in evidence: a group of employees who had been with the Bank for 3 to 15 months, and a group of employees who had been with the Bank for 16 to 18 months. Thus, the analysis of the data with respect to the hypothesis was based on a comparison of these two groups.

A t-test was used to investigate whether the different levels of work experience affect newcomers' perception of information adequacy. The result was not significant ($t_{245} = -.179$, $p > .001$, see Table 1). Thus, this hypothesis was not supported. There was no difference in perceived information adequacy among newcomers based on their length of association with the Bank. Newcomers who had been with the Bank three to fifteen months rated the adequacy of the information they had received as $\bar{X} = 3.5921$, while those who had been with the Bank sixteen to eighteen months rated the adequacy of the information as $\bar{X} = 3.6077$ (see Table 2).

Table 1: T-test Comparison of Employees Based on Length of Association with the Bank

	Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig (2-tailed)
ADEQUAT: Equal variances assumed	.553	.458	-.179	245	.858
not Equal variances assumed			-.182	213.386	.856

Note: ADEQUAT = Information Adequacy

Table 2: Means of Levels for Work Experience

MONTH	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
ADEQUAT: 3-15 MONTH	3.5921	.6382	96
16-18 MONTH	3.6077	.6877	151

Note: ADEQUAT = Information Adequacy

Conclusion

This study attempts to examine newcomer assessments of the adequacy of the information made available to them via various sources. The subjects in this study consisted of 247 employed from Bangkok Bank, with data collection accomplished through the use of a written questionnaire. A t-test was used to examine differences prior to accepting employment with the Bank. The data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science.

The hypothesis predicted that there would be a difference in perceived information adequacy among employees who, while still considered newcomers, had been with the organization for varying lengths of time and, thus, should be at different points in the assimilation process.

This hypothesis was not supported. In all probability, the explanation for this finding rests the fact that all newcomers go through a training prior to starting their jobs. Thus, all newcomers receive the same basic information concerning the organizations as well as a measure of job-relevant information. Banking operations tend to be routine and systematic. Employees know their duties very well. So, with a standard orientation provided, all relatively new employees might very well find themselves on an equal footing. Information does not vary as a function of previous work experience.

Limitation

The sample for this study was homogeneous in many respects. Although our respondents entered a variety of department within the Bank, and displayed a variety of a personal characteristics, for the purpose of generalizability a more diverse sample of newcomers might be preferred.

Future Research

Future research concerning newcomer information adequacy might well benefit from attention to different professions and industries. Another important direction for future research would be to assess the amount and quality of information adequacy that newcomer actually obtain from their information seeking efforts.

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