NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

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The conceptual domain of new employee orientation programs is defined. Following this, orientation programs are distinguished from socialization, psychological contracts, training, and realistic job previews (RJP). Three somewhat diverse areas of academic research are used to develop a framework for the design and study of new employee orientation programs: (a) stress theory/coping methods, (b) attitude theory/change methods, (c) RJP theory/methods. The framework for designing new employee orientation is called “ROPES,” an acronym for Realistic Orientation Programs for new Employee Stress. Five field experiments that best represent ROPES are reviewed. Future research on newcomer orientation should be guided by a clear definition of the conceptual domain, borrow liberally from related areas of inquiry, be conducted in field settings, and use experimental designs.

New employee orientation programs are commonplace in business, education, and the military. In the 1980s, two surveys reported that such programs were used in 64 percent (Louis, Posner, & Powell, 1988) and 70 percent (Zenke, 1982) of the organizations sampled. A 1994 survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 87 percent of the respondents said their organizations provided orientation programs. A recent survey of British business organizations found that 93 percent had formal orientation programs (Anderson, Cunningham-Snell, & Haigh, 1996).

Orientation programs have rarely been the subject of scholarly thinking and research, in contrast to other areas of human resource management such as testing, interviewing, performance appraisal, and training. As will be seen later, the current body of research work is too small for meta-analysis, so that a descriptive summary will be provided instead.

The main purpose of this article is to close the gap between common practice on the one hand and scholarly theory/research on the other. We
begin by discussing the conceptual domain of orientation. In order to
delineate this domain, orientation will be compared and contrasted with
related organizational entry topics: socialization, psychological contracts,
training, and realistic job previews (RJPs). It is argued that theory and
research on orientation, as well as its design in practice, are best guided by
three existing frameworks: (a) stress theory/coping methods, (b) attitude
theory/change, and (c) RJP theory/practice. Finally, we argue that research-
ers need to agree on the parameters of what constitutes orientation, and
proceed with field experiments. Experiments represent the strongest design
for assessing the effects of orientation, and they seem particularly feasible
when the participants are newcomers to organizations.

DEFINING NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION

One way to define the conceptual domain of orientation is to answer four
questions: (a) Who? (b) When? (c) What? (d) How? The “who” question is
relatively easy because newcomers to organizations are included by definition.
However, whether one should also include internal transfers is an open
question at this time, as little has been written on this particular group. If
an internal transition is as dramatic as the transition experienced by outsiders
as new employees, then it most certainly should receive an appropriate
orientation. For example, the “what” of an internal transfer might include
very specific job-oriented information to the exclusion of information about the
larger organization.

Second, the “when” of orientation has been a matter of some debate. Most
writers seem to agree that orientation is the first, or close to the first, event in
the actual entry of newcomers to organizations. However, not everyone agrees
how long orientation should last. With the exception of Wanous (1992) who
asserted that orientation includes the first day and up to the first week after
entry, no dialog about this issue has emerged, so we will maintain his
definition for the present. In the British survey mentioned previously, two-
thirds of the newcomer orientation programs lasted between 1 and 5 days,
which is consistent with our approach (Anderson et al., 1996). However, 54
percent of the newcomer orientation programs occurred within the first 4
weeks on the job (Anderson et al., 1996), which seems to imply that some of
them were spread out over a longer period of time than just the first week.

Third, the “what” question refers to the content of orientation. According
to the British survey, three areas are covered in most orientation programs:
(a) health and safety issues, (b) terms and conditions of employment, and (c)
the organization itself, e.g., history, a tour, and an introduction to co-workers.
This type of content also seems consistent with published accounts of new-
comer orientation programs here in the US (e.g., Klubnik, 1987; Mulling,
1999; Shea, 1982).

We believe, however, that the typical orientation program has been too
narrow in focus. That is, most organizations focus their orientations solely
or primarily on imparting information. However, previous research indicates that newcomers require more than information about terms of employment and related factors in order to adjust. They also require help in establishing new relationships and in managing the anxiety and stress that accompanies the newcomer experience (Bourne, 1967). More will be said later about this.

The final element of our definition concerns how new employee orientation is accomplished. Several complementary methods for “teaching” newcomers can be used.

First, because feelings, particularly those associated with high stress and anxiety, should be a major focus of orientation, the two basic approaches to coping with stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) are included: (a) problem-focused methods and (b) emotion-focused methods. Work on RJP's is also relevant for this aspect of an orientation program.

Second, intentions and actions are included in our definition, especially those concerned with establishing and maintaining new interpersonal relationships. Thus, we recommend that the behavior modeling approach to skills training (Goldstein & Sorcher, 1974) should also be used to teach new employees in orientation programs.

PUTTING NEWCOMER ORIENTATION IN CONTEXT

The following discussion serves to distinguish orientation from related constructs, as well as to acknowledge similarities and overlaps among them.

Orientation Versus Socialization

New employee orientation and organizational socialization have some elements in common, but differ from each other in significant ways. They are similar in that both are concerned with the post-entry period, as compared to other organizational entry topics such as recruitment and selection that are pre-entry topics. A second similarity is that both are concerned with issues of person-organization “fit,” as previously articulated by Wanous (1980, 1992) in his Matching Model, and more recently, by others (e.g., Kristof, 1996). In the Wanous Matching Model, the relevant match-up for fitting concerns a newcomer's basic needs (e.g., Maslow, 1943) and specific job wants on the one hand, and the organization's culture and climates (Reichers & Schneider, 1990), on the other.

There are, however, at least five ways that orientation and socialization differ. The first three of these five are concerned with orientation being a more focused topic than socialization. First, the post-entry time period for orientation is relatively short, between the first day and the first week, as mentioned earlier. Second, fewer organization members are involved in orientation compared to those involved in socialization. Socialization processes affect all employees, because socialization ebbs and
flows with transitions across different types of organizational boundaries (Schein, 1971): (a) from outside to inside (organizational entry), (b) from lower to higher levels (hierarchical), (c) from one type of job to another (functional), and (d) from being on the periphery of power to the core of power (inclusional).

The third difference concerns the actual content of an orientation program in comparison to socialization. There are a number of writers who have offered definitions of what is involved in organizational socialization and the important point is that all seem to agree that socialization concerns all work-related facets of one’s life. For example, an early statement of organizational assimilation used role theory as the basis for understanding this transition (Graen, Orris, & Johnson, 1973). Operationally speaking, Graen et al. (1973) used a fairly broad list of 14 role activities to define the degree of newcomer assimilation. More recently, the domain of socialization has been said to include six basic dimensions, based on a factor analysis of 39 items (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). The six factors identified are the following: history, language, politics, people, organizational goals and values, and performance proficiency. A conceptual approach to defining the domain of socialization by Taormina (1997) was inspired by Chao et al. (1994), but appears to be even broader. Finally, Nicholson (1984) proposed that work–role transitions involve both role development, as well as personal development (see Ashforth & Saks, 1995, for a more recent empirical examination of the Nicholson model). The main point is that socialization involves broad-based changes in newcomers, beyond those associated with organizational entry issues of fitting in.

The fourth difference concerns a somewhat unique aspect of newcomer orientation compared to organizational socialization. Using Schein’s (1971) model of organizational boundaries, it is apparent that the move from outside to inside an organization also implies movement across the other boundaries. Everything is new, and there is much to be learned. One’s role-set is unfamiliar. Thus, role ambiguity is probably at its peak for newcomers, and ambiguity leads to stress.

There is an assortment of evidence showing that newcomers are under considerable stress. A classic study by Bourne (1967) found physiological indicators of stress peaked after entry during the first day, and then rapidly decreased over the next few days. More recently, Nelson et al. have used the stress framework to analyze the early period after entry (Nelson, 1987; Nelson, Quick, Eakin, & Matuszek, 1995; Nelson, Quick, & Joplin, 1991). Empirical research has also found that newcomer beliefs seem to change rapidly after entry (Bauer & Green, 1994; Thomas & Anderson, 1998; Wanous, 1976), and this is another indicator of the stress experienced by them.

The fifth and final difference from socialization is that new employee orientation usually is a program/event rather than a process. Given the earlier discussion (i.e., Who? When? What?), orientation can be thought of as a combination of events occurring early after entry that can be studied sepa-
rately from socialization. From a research perspective this is a very important distinction, because it makes the study of orientation much easier than the study of socialization. The specific, program-oriented focus of orientation avoids the main problem facing socialization researchers, i.e., when does socialization begin and end, or does it ever end.

Because orientation can be considered as a program bounded by a fairly brief time period, researchers have the opportunity to study orientation experimentally. In contrast, there are no experimental studies of socialization, according to a recent review of that literature (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998, pp. 198–207).

Orientation Versus Psychological Contracts

According to Rousseau (1995, p.9), a psychological contract concerns “beliefs that individuals hold regarding promises made, accepted, and relied on between themselves and another (employee, client, manager, organization).” Contracts are conceptualized as a within-person individual level phenomenon. Even though three other types of contracts are discussed (implied, normative, and social), psychological contracts are themselves quite broad in what is covered. They may be written or verbal.

There are two clear similarities between psychological contracts and orientation. First, both concern beliefs and expectations. Second, one main purpose of new employee orientation is to begin conveying the psychological contract. For those organizations having written versions, orientation appears to be the logical time for distribution.

Despite these similarities, orientation and psychological contracts are different in several important ways. First, because of its limited duration, an orientation program cannot include the breadth of psychological contracts. Orientation will necessarily be limited to those aspects of psychological contracts that are most relevant for newcomers. The rest will be learned via socialization.

Second, although both orientation and contracts concern beliefs and expectations, orientation also includes feelings (particularly those associated with various stressors), intentions, and actions. It is these latter areas (feelings, intentions, and actions) where orientation is broader than psychological contracts. For example, contracts concern what an employee can expect an organization to do, which is a form of intent or action. However, the intentions and actions refer to the organization. In contrast, during orientation the intentions and actions are those of the newcomer, who is being taught how to cope with a variety of new, stressful situations.

Third, the role set of those involved in orientation is more limited than that for psychological contracts. Managers, in particular, are an important source of contract information, perhaps more so than during orientation. Agents, those who may represent the organization are another source of information, and one that would not be part of an orientation program. The list of those involved does not stop, e.g., RJs, manuals, compensa-
tion systems, performance reviews, and so on, all convey psychological contract information.

**Orientation Versus Training**

Training might seem an odd topic to be included for comparison purposes, because it is not usually considered part of organizational entry research. However, there are several similarities with orientation. First, both are primarily concerned with organizational influence on employees, rather than the reverse. Second, both are programs rather than processes, and that makes the literature on training methods and training evaluation particularly relevant for orientation. Third, both suffer from the same problem that plagues all “programs,” i.e., it is often difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the various individual components of the program.

Finally, both can involve behavior modeling as a training method. In the case of orientation, we recommend that behavior modeling become a normal part of a program because of the focus on interpersonal skills. Whetten and Cameron (1993) have identified 10 skills characteristic of most successful managers, e.g., motivating and influencing others, delegating, team building, managing conflict, and so on. Drawing upon this work, Nelson et al. (1995) note that these skills are primarily people-oriented in nature. Further, they recommend organizations pay particular attention to these skills for the newly hired in order to develop what they call “a self-reliant workforce.”

However, there are at least three important differences between orientation and training. First, orientation is more concerned with context performance than with task performance. According to Borman and Motowidlo (1993, p. 73), context performance can include the following: (a) volunteering for activities not formally part of the job, (b) persisting with extra effort to finish one’s own tasks, (c) helping and cooperating with others, (d) following organizational rules/procedures, even when inconvenient, and (e) supporting or defending organizational objectives. Although Borman and Motowidlo (1993) may have coined the terms task versus context performance, this distinction can be traced back to early work on organizational role theory (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), and more recently, to organizational citizenship behaviors (Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983) and to pro-social organizational behavior (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). It must be noted that the activities constituting context performance tend to be similar throughout an organization, whereas task activities are specific to different jobs. This makes context performance a topic that can be included in an orientation program for all newcomers.

The second and third differences between orientation and training are related to each other. Orientation typically occurs upon entry, or very soon thereafter, whereas training can occur throughout one’s career. Because of the timing difference between them, orientation occurs during a period of high stress associated with entry, whereas training occurs when these issues probably have been resolved.
Orientation Versus the RJP

There are three similarities between orientation and the RJP. First, both communicate important, but realistic information to newcomers. This information is often negative, although the proportion of negative versus positive information should be determined by research. Second, the implied meta-message is one of caring about the newcomer. In particular, the caring message concerns the overall fit of the newcomer with the organization in terms of both being able to do the job and being able to find satisfaction as an employee (Wanous, 1980, 1992). Third, the primary (but not only) criterion for the success is the job survival/turnover rates for newcomers.

There are, however, five important differences that account for orientation being treated separately from RJPs. First, the most obvious one is that orientation occurs after both job choice and organizational entry. Despite this distinction, most previous reviews of RJPs have included studies where job preview information was presented to people either: (a) after job choice, but before entry, and (b) after both job choice and after entry (albeit usually the first day on the job). As will be seen below, this can lead to some confusion, because how the information is presented may make the difference between classifying a study as an RJP versus orientation.

The second difference is that an orientation should be designed to encourage newcomers to remain with the organization. This is somewhat different from the typical RJP where one purpose is to encourage (implicitly or explicitly) the individual to think very carefully about whether the job/organization will be a good fit. This is what has been called the “self-selection” effect. It is difficult to establish empirically, because drop-out rates, per se, are not the most sensitive nor relevant indicator of actual self-selection (Wanous, 1973). In order for a self-selection effect to be identified, one needs measures of employee job wants and needs, on the one hand, and the rewards associated with organizational climates and culture, on the other hand (Wanous, 1992).

The third difference is that orientation is broader than an RJP because it should include performance-related information that will help the newcomer succeed. As mentioned earlier in the context of training, this information is what can be called context (vs. task) performance. This means that orientation programs can also be assessed with measures of context performance, as well as job survival.

The fourth difference is that an RJP most likely will raise stress levels of job candidates because of the negative information presented to them. Research has shown that job candidates tend to have somewhat inflated expectations at this point of organizational entry (Wanous, 1976; 1992). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that their overall level of stress is lower than after they actually enter the organization, where first day stress can be particularly high (Bourne, 1967). In contrast, a newcomer orientation program should be designed to lower stress levels, not raise them. In a word, the RJP increases stress towards the optimal level in order for job candidates to be more vigilant decision-
makers (Janis & Mann, 1977), whereas an orientation program decreases stress towards the optimal level.

The final difference is that an orientation program should be teaching newcomers skills, not just presenting information. These skills will most likely fall into two categories: (a) stress-coping and (b) interpersonal skills related to context performance.

REALISTIC ORIENTATION PROGRAMS FOR NEW EMPLOYEE STRESS (ROPES)

Based on the previous discussion of orientation in the context of other organizational entry topics, it should probably be clear that we believe that orientation programs should be primarily focused on teaching coping skills for the most important stressors facing newcomers. The acronym, ROPES, was coined by Wanous (1992), because newcomers need to "learn the ropes."

We will first present the basic principles of the Wanous (1992) ROPES concept, updating where necessary. Then, we will review those studies that best exemplify these principles. Our article will conclude with a suggested research agenda.

ROPES Revisited and Revised

The first principle is to "include realistic information" at the orientation. This means that newcomers should be forewarned about the typical disappointments they can expect, as well as adjustment problems that might occur with increasing experience, not just those associated with entry shock.

We believe that this first principle should be expanded to include additional information, based on our earlier definition that an orientation program should an emphasis on feelings, intentions, and actions. Newcomers need to know how they might feel and how that compares to the typical person. They need to know what types of goals to set for their continuing adjustment to the new organization. And, they need to know what actions will be most beneficial in making a successful transition. It is insufficient to know that "your first boss might be particularly unforgiving towards mistakes." Newcomers also need to know how they might feel when this occurs ("you will feel rejected, anxious, etc"), and how to cope with the situation by making plans/setting goals ("get clear objectives from your boss, so success can be mutually determined"), and taking action ("always meet your deadlines").

The second principle is to "provide general support and reassurance" to newcomers. This principle represents the emotion-focused approach to stress coping. In many organizations, a common fear among newcomers is that they will not be good enough to succeed, e.g., making partner in a law firm, or making it through basic training in the military. Organizations should determine the actual success rates and communicate these to newcomers, because sometimes newcomer expectations are overly pessimistic, as has been

Based on research in organizational entry, we want to re-emphasize this principle. For example, both Fisher (1985) and Nelson et al. (1991) have noted that one of the best ways to cope with stress is to have social support (see also House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988, for a review of the stress research that led to this recommendation).

The people encountered by newcomers are quite important in their adjustment to a new organization, despite the recent trend in socialization research toward examining issues of pro-action by the individual newcomer. For example, Bauer and Green (1998) found that information seeking by newcomers was much less important to effective socialization than actions by one's new manager. They also concluded that information-seeking by newcomers is secondary to the influence of insiders when both are measured and accounted for.

The third, fourth, and fifth principles are taken directly from the behavior modeling method of training (Goldstein & Sorcher, 1974), and will be discussed as a set. Briefly, they are: (a) "use models to show coping skills," (b) "the model's actions should be discussed," and (c) "rehearsal is necessary" (Wanous, 1992). Taken together, these three principles from behavior modeling training represent the second major way for newcomers to cope with entry and adjustment stress, i.e., the problem-focused approach (vs. the emotion-focused approach). These principles are meant to be applied to the teaching of interpersonal skills important for newcomer adjustment.

No published study of newcomer orientation has incorporated all three of these behavior modeling principles. In a previous review of newcomer orientation research (Wanous, 1992) only three studies were found. Of the three, two incorporated behavior models (Meglino, DeNisi, Youngblood, & Williams, 1988; Novaco, Cook, & Sarason, 1983), but did not discuss the models' actions, nor have behavior rehearsal (with feedback) by the newcomers. One study had discussions of how to cope with certain interpersonal situations (Gomersall & Myers, 1966), but neither has models demonstrating the behavior, nor was there any rehearsal. Since that review, two additional field experiments of newcomer orientation have been conducted (Buckley, Fedor, Veres, Weise, & Carraher, 1998; Waung, 1995), but neither of these incorporated all three behavior modeling principles either. Despite this, these two new studies are noteworthy in their own right, as will be discussed later.

Principle six is "teach self-control of thoughts and feelings." This was derived from the considerable literature on coping with stress, particularly physical pain from invasive medical or dental procedures (Wanous, 1992, pp. 175–178).

Waung's (1995) study is an excellent example of the sixth principle. She compared two types of newcomer orientations: (a) behavioral coping and (b) behavioral and affective coping methods combined. These two complementary coping methods exemplify both of the basic approaches to stress coping, i.e., problem-focused and emotion-focused. Her study is unique in this regard.
Nevertheless, it is not a full-fledged study of the ROPES approach, because behavior modeling was not used for the problem-focused coping skills that were interpersonal in nature. It is important to note, however, that behavior modeling cannot really be applied to emotion-focused skills, such as those in the Novaco et al. (1983) or Waung (1995) orientation programs, because these skills are intra-psychic rather than inter-personal.

A recent and very interesting application of the problem-focused stress coping method for new executives was found, although it is a non-experimental study based on just 15 persons (Rudisill, Hempy, Eddy, Zimmerman, & Rudisill, 1998). Despite its limitations, the authors describe “the executive fit rehearsal” as a four-step process. The first step is a formal psychological assessment of both a high level executive and the intended new executive who will be his/her direct report. Instruments such as the 16 Personality Factors Questionnaire, the California Psychological Inventory, or the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator were used by a consulting psychologist. Depending on time and resources, they suggest that intelligence tests, vocational interest tests, or management style tests also be used. Each person then receives feedback about his/her results and signs a consent form to release this information to the other party.

Step two of the executive fit rehearsal begins by having each person answer a set of job-specific questions based on their own test scores and those of the other. Such questions include: (a) how might personality differences affect our success, (b) how do our personal goals mesh with those of the organization, (c) what do we need from each other to be successful, (d) what is likely to be disruptive in our relationship, (e) what are our respective roles and role boundaries, (f) how will our working and managerial styles fit together, and (g) what happens if we fail to work well together and how will we terminate the relationship (Rudisill et al., 1998, p. 37). The second stage concludes with a face-to-face meeting facilitated by the consulting psychologist.

Steps three and four of the executive fit rehearsal are essentially follow-ups to the face-to-face meeting. In step three the consultant drafts a written record of the meeting and negotiates a final draft that is acceptable to both parties. In step four, a meeting is scheduled for a pre-determined time, such as 1 year later.

Principle seven is that “specific stressors should be targeted to specific newcomers.” This principle was derived from the Gomonsll and Myers (1966) study. In that work, newcomers received different information depending on who would be their new boss. To our knowledge, this continues to be the only research study in which this principle has been applied.

We think that it continues to make sense because there may be considerable differences among the set of bosses that a newcomer might encounter. Thus, at least this portion of the orientation program should be tailor-made, although many other facets of it might not have to be so specific. Both early (Graen et al., 1973) and current research on newcomer role assimilation (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995) using the Leader–Member Exchange (Graen, 1976) and Team–Member Exchange (Seers, 1989) concepts found them to be relevant
for successful assimilation into a new organization. The key element in both types of exchange is the matching of a newcomer to a particular boss or to a particular team, a process that seems consistent with what Gomersall and Myers (1966) did many years ago.

**EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH ON NEWCOMER ORIENTATION**

**Description of Research to Date**

Table 1 summarizes the basic characteristics of five newcomer orientation experiments that we found. Each one is assessed in terms of the criteria for orientation programs that have been advocated here: (a) their content, (b) stress coping methods used, (c) whether coping information and/or methods were tailored to specific people, (d) the extent of behavior modeling training, and (e) the type of criteria used to evaluate the orientation program.

The last factor presented in Table 1 is the type of criteria used to evaluate an orientation program. Guiding our recommendations is the training evaluation framework articulated by Kirkpatrick (1960), who set forth three types: (a) reactions of trainees, (b) how much was learned, (c) measurable results at work. Wexley and Latham (1981) expanded this list by expanding the last category to include both on-the-job behaviors and measurable cost-related outcomes. We have adapted the expanded list of four types of criteria, because of our emphasis on context performance, which seems a good fit for what Wexley and Latham called the behavioral category. In the results category we

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include such measurable cost factors as employee turnover/job survival, absence, and job performance.

It is also important for researchers to have some agreed upon set of criteria for assessing the effectiveness of orientation programs. In this regard, we consider our adaptation of Kirkpatrick's criteria as an opening statement for a dialog on the criterion problem as applied to newcomer orientation.

As can be seen in Table 1, no single study conducted to date has embodied all of the procedures of a ROPES program. Further, no study has assessed its results using the full set of criteria that might be considered. As a set, however, six of the seven ROPES principles are accounted for. The only exception is that no study used rehearsal of coping behaviors. In the case where emotion-focused coping skills are taught, such as studies by Novaco et al. (1983) or Waung (1995), it is impossible to assess the extent to which individuals may have practiced these skills inside their own minds. Thus, rehearsal refers to problem-focused coping skills that involve observable behavioral skills that were taught to newcomers.

Including context performance makes sense, given our definition of what ought to be included in orientation. It must be noted, however, that the originators of this concept (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993) were careful to point out some potential problems in attempting to include such behaviors as part of training and to formalize them as measures of on-the-job effectiveness. First, they point out that it is problematic for any organization to require employees to do more than what their jobs actually call for. Second, the more such behaviors become the norm, the less spontaneous they can be. If certain behaviors are linked to reward systems, only these behaviors may be produced at the expense of other, valuable behaviors that might be more difficult to measure. Third, if everyone is expected to do the same thing, organizational spontaneity as a whole may suffer. Students of organizational socialization have recognized this last problem because conformity pressure on newcomers can severely limit innovation in organizations (Schein, 1968).

A Research Agenda for ROPES

In order for a research agenda to be developed, the topic itself must be clearly defined so that the “it” being studied does not vary too much from study to study. In this spirit we set forth a definition of what newcomer orientation should include at the outset of this article, and followed this with a particular emphasis on stress coping. Finally, we distinguished orientation from related organizational entry topics.

Based on this, then, the ROPES approach to orientation focuses on newcomers during their first day/week. It includes not just information that will create realistic expectations, but also addresses the feelings associated with being a newcomer. Further, it has a particular focus on teaching newcomers how to handle organizational entry and adjustment stress from both the problem- and emotion-focused perspectives. The exact content of a ROPES program will vary among organizations to the extent that their
respective cultures/climates vary. However, there is likely to be considerable similarity among different organizations in the teaching of how to succeed at context performance.

Research and thinking about orientation is probably at the same stage of concept development as RJP's were 25 years ago. That is, a consensus on its definition has yet to be reached throughout the field, relatively few studies have been conducted, and it is difficult to cumulate what has been done because the studies are somewhat different (see Reichers and Schneider, 1990 for a discussion of typical stages in concept development).

Thus, we recommend that researchers set up partnerships with various types of organizations (business, educational, and the military) to develop ROPES programs and assess their impact. In the early days of RJP research, it was an open question as to whether any meaningful effect could be produced. It was only years later, when enough studies had been conducted, that meta-analysts concluded that there was a predictable, albeit modest effect on newcomer turnover/job survival (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985; Phillips, 1998; Premack & Wanous, 1985).

We also recommend that research proceed on orientation programs, per se, rather than delve into questions about the effectiveness of their individual component parts. In other words, let us first establish that such programs can have desirable effects. Assessment of their component parts, or the role of situational moderators, can wait until there is a sufficient body of research available. The most recent review of RJP research (Phillips, 1998) focused on various aspects of the previews themselves (e.g., written vs. interview) and certain situational moderators (e.g., lab vs. field, or the military vs. business). Phillips' review could not have been written 10 or 15 years ago, because there were too few studies.

We further recommend that field experimental research be the design of choice for these investigations. Some topics in organizational entry research lend themselves to this strong design, e.g., RJP's and orientation is another.

Our final recommendation is to borrow liberally from what we already know in related areas of research. For example, we have already recommended that some of the basic elements of behavioral modeling be incorporated into the relevant part of ROPES Further, one can find some useful guidelines for program development from what has been learned about RJP's. In particular, we think that some of the specific findings uncovered in the recent review by Phillips (1998) are worth adopting. For example, verbal previews seem to be best for increasing newcomer job survival and video previews seem best for increasing newcomer job performance.

The two major paradigms for attitude change that have emerged from social psychology provide some general rules-of-thumb that can be incorporated into ROPES design. The original paradigm, the Yale Persuasive Communications Model (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953) was composed of four major factors: (a) source of a persuasive message, (b) message content, (c) medium used, and (d) receiver characteristics. Based on our reading of the research associated with this paradigm, we can offer principles for ROPES design based on the first
three of these four factors. First, the source of the message must be credible, and so we recommend that line management, including representatives from top management, be primarily responsible for an orientation program. Second, counter-arguments have been found effective, and so we recommend that every stressor or realistic expectation described to newcomers also be accompanied by a way to cope with it, whether problem- or emotion-focused. Third, video and interpersonal media seem to have been more effective than written media, a result confirmed by RJP research, so we recommend that ROPES be a combination of both with less reliance on booklets.

The second major paradigm in persuasive communications is called the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). One of the ELM principles for successful attitude change is to have few distractions. So, we recommend that ROPES be conducted in such locations, rather than where one's work is actually being performed. A second principle is to repeat the message frequently for retention. Accordingly, we recommend multiple sources of information about newcomer stress problems and solutions, e.g., from line management, from experienced personnel, as well as from video sources.

A third ELM principle is to make the message personally relevant. The early orientation study by Gomersall and Myers (1966) pre-dates the ELM model but is the embodiment of this particular principle. In that program, newcomers were given specifically unique information about their future bosses. The fourth principle from ELM is to encourage explicit thinking. If program designers adopt our recommendation to use behavioral modeling, this principle will also be incorporated. When newcomers are asked to discuss the actions taken by a behavioral model, to rehearse these actions and receive constructive feedback, they are most certainly engaging in explicit thinking about what is to be learned.

REFERENCES


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