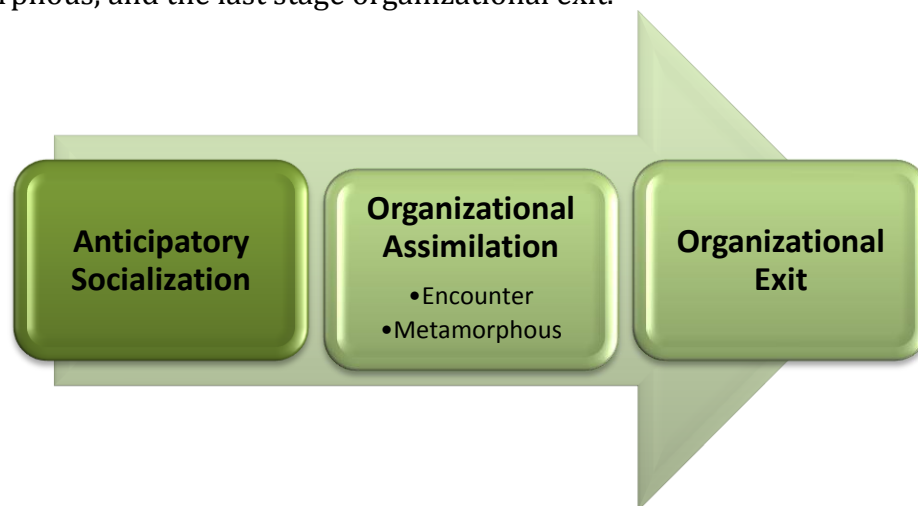


Assimilation Processes

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There have been many studies trying to understand assimilation processes and socialization. The drive behind the research has been to identify what contributes to a strong organizational culture and how to effectively implement those standards in the assimilation of newcomers to the organization.

Fedric Jablin, one of the early pioneers in this field of study, established a theory that consisted of three stages in the organizational socialization process: Anticipatory socialization, organizational assimilation with two sub-stages, encounter and metamorphous, and the last stage organizational exit.



Anticipatory Socialization is a conditioning that most people have developed before ever entering any organization. It is a set of perceived ideas, expectations and beliefs relating to how people interact in a particular job setting. Anticipatory socialization is based on an individual's image of a job and the possibility of having that job in the future. There are two phases of anticipatory socialization; vocational choice, and organizational choice.

Vocational choice is the process of gathering occupational information as a person grows up. Various sources are influential on a person during the phase of vocational anticipatory socialization: family, friends, religion, school, part-time employment, and media.



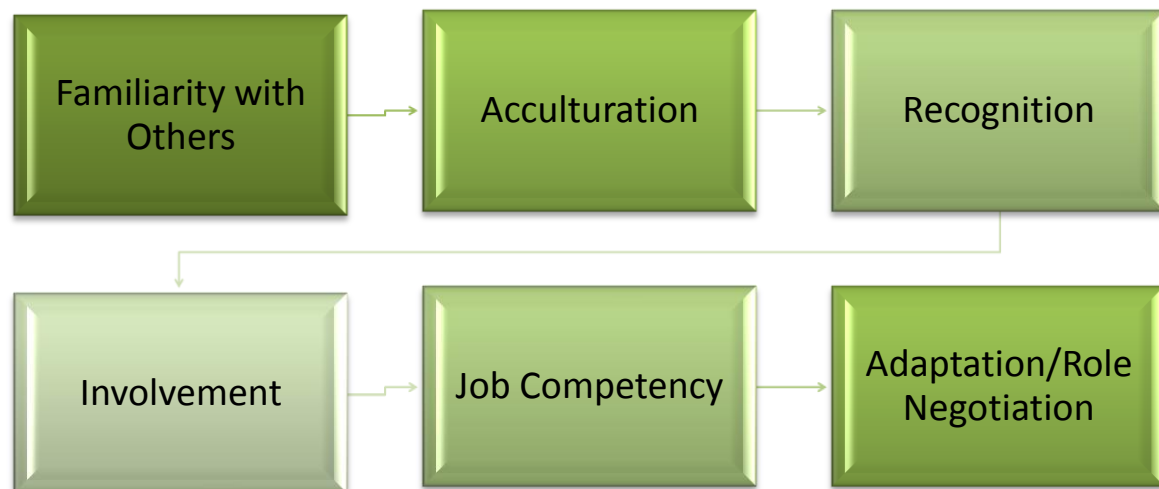
The second phase is the process of organizational choice. This phase involves the expectations a person develops about an organization during the process of applying for employment.

The first sub-stage of organizational assimilation is encounter. This is where a new employee is in the process of becoming comfortable with their co-workers and

understanding their role within the organization. The second sub-stage is Metamorphous. This describes the change within the new employee as he becomes an acknowledged member having learned the behaviors and values connected to the organization.

Finally, the organizational exit stage is when an employee leaves the organization for another position, or organization. Regardless of reason for leaving, the employee will take with them the understanding and ability which they have gained from the organization and incorporate them into another organization. While each of these stages is important to the assimilation process, other researchers found them to be lacking key details.

Karen Kroman Myers and John G. Oetzel took the deficiencies of Jablin's studies and expanded them into six dimensions of organizational assimilation. These dimensions or processes are linked with becoming an acknowledged member of an organization and offer the groundwork for developing assimilation within an organization.



The first dimension is Familiarity with others. The uncertainty that many new employees feel is can be eased through interpersonal feedback processes and interactions. Co-workers are a valuable source of information to new employees; teaching them the values, norms and behaviors that are part of the organizations culture. By helping new employees create a wide variety of co-worker relationships, it helps them feel more connected, makes them more likely to get the information they need to be productive, and fuels their satisfaction and commitment to the organization. When this process is included in the assimilation, the drives for bond and comprehension are met, which should improve the overall motivation within the organization. Looking for innovative ways to introduce the “new guy” allows employees a low-key way of getting to know each other. Informal gatherings



such as lunches and company gathering can offer new employees one-on-one time with an array of co-workers.



Acculturation is the next dimension. Simply defined acculturation is learning and accepting a culture. In trying to comprehend the difference between assimilation and acculturation I found an example illustrated by Archie Jeter. He related stories of immigrants moving into the new culture of America. Early in the history of the United States this process would have been described as assimilation, as immigrants replaced their native home cultures with the new ones of America. Today, the trend that we are seeing is better described as acculturation. This is when a person maintains their native culture's customs, history and values, but also adjusts, recognizes and adds customs of the new culture, combining the two, becoming bi-cultural.

Applying this knowledge to an organization allows us to see the benefit of acculturation. The question becomes is it more important for a new employee to assimilate, by adopting the new culture and values and discarding old cultural information; or is there value in the experience that can be gathered in acculturation? I see acculturation as being a two sided part of assimilation. There are new ideas and concepts for the new employee to learn as they adapt and adjust to the new culture, but a new employee offers fresh ideas that go beyond the status quo.

The third dimension is recognition. Being recognized by superiors or co-workers is a valuable form of non-verbal feedback to new employees. It communicates the importance of their work, their value as an employee, and is a significant part of helping them feeling like an accepted member. Recognition also reinforces the drive to comprehend.



Next is the employee's level of involvement. This can measure the degree to which a new employee has assimilated into the organization. When employees are involved they find ways to add to the productivity of the organization. This can be made manifest by an employee volunteering to take on additional work or responsibilities for the benefit of the organization. Involvement shows commitment and loyalty to the organization.

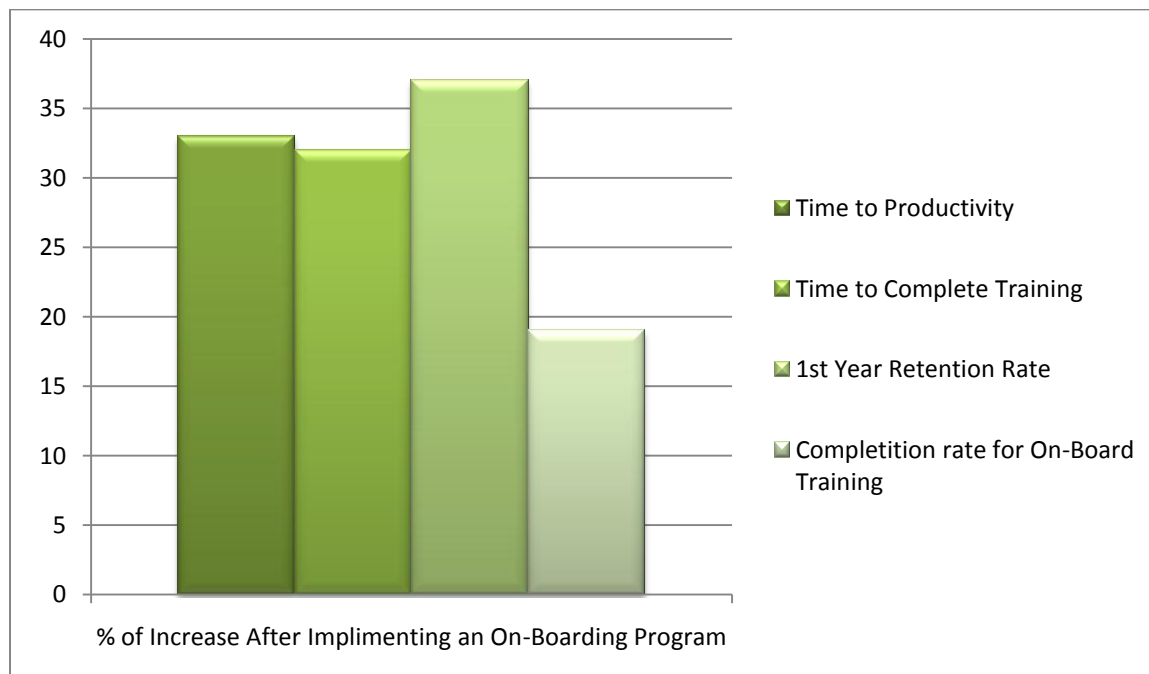
Job competency is another significant facet of assimilation process. When an employee is able to demonstrate their ability to perform their roles and responsibilities with accuracy they have accomplished another stage in the process.

The final dimension is adaptation and role negotiation. As a new employee shows their ability to adapt and negotiate roles it proves that they are establishing themselves within the organization. Role negotiation is where the employee addresses the differences between their expectations of the organization/job and the expectations the organization has of them. Adaptation is more compromise on the part of the employee, where they adapt or adjust to the organizations culture.



Each of these models shows the importance to both informational and relational approaches to the assimilation process. While information can be given to new employees in a textual form, the greater knowledge comes from the members and their understanding of the organizations culture. This is why it is so important to create a strong culture that has a consistent set of deliberate steps in an interactive socialization process.

Some organizations have adopted a process call “Rapid On-boarding” to execute the assimilation process quickly; this helps to avoid attrition, lack of productivity and disconnected employees in an effort to establish a “hit the ground running” mentality.



Source: AberdeenGroup, August 2006

By creating an on-boarding roadmap an organization establishes a long term strategic plan for assimilation that begins with the hiring process and sees an employee through those first critical six difficult months of transition. When an organization goes about creating this road map they have to look at several key elements of their organizations culture that they feel important transfer quickly to a new employee. These elements should capture the stages and processes of assimilation as discussed earlier. Capital One has a process that has proven successful which offers three stages in On-boarding. “Getting a lay of the land” creates a useful and customized guide for managers to quickly see what direction they need to take with their new role and responsibilities. “Meeting the team” is a productive time for the new manager to find out what the employees are thinking and expecting of him. This stage also includes a support team of the boss, an executive coach and an assimilation

buddy. This support group follows up and guides the manager to success. “Checking in” happens after six months on the job. This is a time where the manager is able to get feedback about his effectiveness and where there is room for growth. On-boarding is a new way of looking at assimilation in a quick and efficient way.

Organizations put a great amount of emphasis on understanding assimilation because it is such an important part of their stability. When there is a lack of assimilation in an organization there is an impact on their employee retention, time, productivity and costs in training and orienting those new employees. Support for newcomers needs to go beyond the recruitment and hiring process; it needs to be incorporated into a well- defined and formalized assimilation process.

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