



LUND UNIVERSITY
School of Economics and Management

Standing out or fitting in?

*A qualitative approach towards how seasoned newcomers experience
organisational socialisation in a new setting*

M.Sc. Managing People, Knowledge and Change

School of Economics and Management · Lund University

May 2014

Author: Anika Hägner (890626-T221)

Supervisor: Katie Sullivan

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Katie Sullivan for the useful comments, remarks and engagement through the learning process of this master thesis. Thank you for your insightful feedback and guidance.

I would also like to thank all my informants for their readiness for participation and self-disclosure. Without you, this thesis would not have been possible.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank my partner and friends for their support.

ABSTRACT

Title:	Standing out or fitting in? - A qualitative approach towards how seasoned newcomers experience organisational socialisation in a new setting
Seminar Date:	3rd June 2014
Course:	Master Thesis in BUSN49, Managing People, Knowledge & Change, Department of Business Administration, School of Economics and Management, Lund University, Sweden
Author:	Anika Hägner
Advisor:	Katie Sullivan
Keywords:	Socialisation, adjustment, work experience, knowledge exchange, seasoned newcomers
Thesis Purpose:	My study aims to investigate how seasoned newcomers experience their organisational socialisation during onboarding in relation to prior experience and the training into the new setting. The study examines how newcomers make sense of the interactive process of socialisation, and how these processes influence their adjustment and willingness to share expertise.
Methodology:	The present study is of a qualitative nature and the material is approached through hermeneutical reading.
Theoretical Perspective:	Relevant conceptualizations of socialisation, newcomer proactivity and interactional learning. Contemporary researches on the intersections between these approaches.
Empirical Foundation:	The paper is based on recently hired employees' accounts of lived experiences in socialisation and adjustment. The empirical material constitutes 12 semi-structured interviews on socialisation during onboarding.
Conclusion:	Newcomer's strategy for adjustment is to employ active strategies of information seeking through established members of the organisation. Insiders hold the power to control knowledge exchange. Insiders regulate what knowledge they share and what knowledge they take in from newcomers' prior experiences. Newcomers react to insiders control with holding back expertise and refraining from bringing themselves in until they lost their status of being 'new'.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In this project I explore how what I call ‘seasoned newcomers’ (Saks et al., 2007) experience organisational socialisation at Cranetec. Cranetec, a maritime crane production company situated in Northern Germany, is in the middle of an extensive restructuring process which includes hiring approximately 100 employees within the next year. In my first meeting with the HR director he verbalised his interest in investigating the onboarding process for new hires in the company. Hiring so many new people within such a short span of time is a mammoth project. In the conversation I expected that management would like to find out how to make it ‘more efficient’ and how to ‘speed people up to full performance’ which would have been in line with the popular literature (Taleo, 2006) which I will review below. Instead questions like “What do people like so far in their onboarding?” and “What don’t they like?” were raised. This led me to believe that he was more interested in how people were doing rather than ‘speeding them up’.

One of the things that makes the onboarding process at Cranetec interesting to study is their attempt to hire seasoned employees, meaning people who already have occupational and industry experience. Since most literature on socialisation focuses on new or recent graduates with, I presume, little or no industry experience, I chose to have a look at *experienced* newcomers in the hopes of contributing to our understanding of this. The second reason is more personally related, as my dad just changed jobs and was going on about how he did not approve of a lot of things in the new company, how everything had been handled so much better before and how nobody would listen to him. This intrigued me and I wondered whether and how other seasoned newcomers would deal with this situation of having all this expertise but nowhere to put it.

1.2. Purpose

The socialisation literature is vast and there are many different ways to go on about the topic. So far there has not been a united framework. Much of the literature is quantitative and deals primarily with correlations between abstract socialisation tactics and managerialist outcomes as ‘speeding newcomers up to full performance’. I feel there is a lack of answering how socialisation happens and go beyond a psychological perspective. What is the actual process like according to those who experience it? Most studies focus a lot on input and output and neglect what is actually happening. Not to mention that the list of limitations is sometimes

longer than the findings section. Adkins (1995) admits that socialisation variables are hard to measure quantitatively. Therefore I see a considerable need for qualitative approaches towards this issue.

Organisations hire new employees all the time. However, nowadays people change their job more often (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012) and therefore come into new organisations with a bag of experiences. Most of the research focused on ‘neophyte’ workers (graduates), who are not only new to the organisation, but the occupation in general. Little is known about how experienced workers undergo the socialisation process (Carr et al., 2006). It has just started to be acknowledged in research (Carr et al., 2006) that there is likely to be a difference in adjusting graduates and experienced newcomers and organisations need to prepare for that.

1.3. Research Question

Taking a qualitative approach towards socialisation gives me the opportunity to engage in newcomers’ subjective experiences which may disclose nuances of meaning that would probably be overlooked in a standardised framework.

My research question was led by the gap discerned in the literature and my personal interest:

- A) *How do seasoned newcomers experience differences between before and now?*
- B) *How do seasoned newcomers experience adjusting to the new organisational setting?*

Answering these questions takes the focus from best-practice and functionalist efficiency approaches to the experience of the individual and its struggle between adjusting themselves and adjusting the new setting within the interactional process of socialisation. The research concerning both of these phenomena seems not to be well integrated and mostly looked upon in a rather separated way (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013).

I talked to newcomers who were just experiencing this process and were willing to be interviewed. To access employees’ accounts on their experiences I conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve newcomers who underwent their onboarding at that time. Through these interviews I was able to gain access to their sense-making¹ as they shared their experiences through their stories and talked to me about how they felt about the onboarding process and included socialisation.

¹ Sensemaking is an ongoing process of retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing and materialise meaning (Weick et al, 2005)

1.4. Main Findings

My interpretations of the collected data are based on a hermeneutical reading and suggest that there is an aspect of socialisation which has been treated shabbily in academic research so far. It showed that context, especially regarding the ways in which colleagues approach newcomers, matters. My primary findings suggest that newcomer socialisation is a double-sided coin that can be productive or destructive, depending on the interaction. Newcomers receive support when seeking information that helps them fit in. However, they find resistance when they attempt to share information and bring in their personal expertise based on prior experiences that might change the status quo. The level of active participation is influenced by the socialisation context they are embedded in. This context is, however, not just 'out there' and approachable in a direct way, but mediated through interactions with established members of the organisation who enact the organisational informal and formal structures in their every day practices. Therefore the organisational context becomes a subjective matter based on its perception by newcomers. This results in differing practices of pro-activity.

1.5. Structure of the Paper

In Chapter 2 I outline the methodological approach of my study, my research process, the foundation for analysis, as well as the limitations and the trustworthiness of my study.

In Chapter 3 I present an overview of some relevant conceptualizations of organisational socialisation, experienced newcomers and the role of established organisational members. In addition, I introduce my analysis of the specific difficulties that come with the socialisation process and how newcomers deal with these.

In Chapter 4 I present my analysis of empirical findings. My main focus here is to understand how experienced newcomers perceived their socialisation in relation to their prior occupational experiences.

In Chapter 5, I give a general interpretation of my findings based on my data analysis and the frames of literature references. Here I will state my contribution to the discussion on socialisation of experienced newcomers.

In Chapter 6 I draw a conclusion from my study and addresses recommendations for future research on experienced newcomer socialisation and adjustment practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study takes a qualitative approach to contribute to a deeper understanding of the newcomers' experiences during onboarding. As social research is strongly influenced by its theoretical and methodological frameworks, I will make my standpoint clear in the following.

My study is informed by the ontological understanding that reality is not naturally given, but socially constructed and interpreted by subjects, who are embedded in a social context and interactions with other subjects (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The underlying epistemology regards the knowledge about 'what is' (ontology) as being subjective and mediated. It is created by learning or experience and shared through communication, e.g. language. This indicates that there is no such thing as objective facts which can be picked up by the researcher.

Following from these paradigmatic assumptions I chose an interpretive approach, focusing on how experienced newcomers make sense of the onboarding process. I conducted semi-structured interviews, which facilitated a reasonably free-floating talk that revealed deep feelings and attitudes.

I used hermeneutics for the data analysis, as I believe the researcher's motivation to study an issue is based on premises within our experiences and theoretical knowledge that one has gathered in the past and therefore cannot be based on any form of neutrality. Hermeneutics, a method of text interpretation, aims to reveal the essential meaning of phenomena through a dialectic movement between understanding and explanation (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Taking an abductive approach my research intent is based on pre-understanding and thorough literature review (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). I aim to develop new knowledge about the socialisation and onboarding process to disclose what has been taken for granted so far.

2.1. Sample

The research was conducted at Cranetec², a large production company situated in Northern Germany. I chose this company due to the vast restructuring process it is going through at the moment. This promised interesting conditions for research, since a lot of new employees are hired and thus making onboarding a crucial topic.

² I changed the name of the company for reasons of anonymity.

2.1.1. CASE DESCRIPTION – CRANETEC

The family owned firm Cranetec by now has grown to a group of firms with almost 39.600 employees in over 130 associated companies on all continents. The holding company's shareholders are exclusively members of the family. The decentralised firm is organized in manageable, independently operating corporate units.

The production site in Northern Germany was founded in 2002 and is part of the Cranetec line. It has been operating since 2005. By now the company has about 1480 employees (2014).

Within six years Cranetec will be developed from a construction site into the maritime center of the firm group, including the establishment of a new construction and development, sales, customer service and marketing unit. At the time of my study 117 newcomers were hired already for the departments to be established. The medium-dated staff requirement will exceed this number. The change process is scheduled to be complete in 2018. There was no unified onboarding process so all newcomers had differing experiences how their onboarding was processed.

Because the production site in Northern Germany was still dependent on its sibling in Austria, most of the newcomers were sent '*down there*' to learn the ropes. Newcomers voiced their motivation to '*experience something new*' and showed high motivation to bring themselves in. Regardless of their prior working experience newcomers were curious to find out how things were handled the '*Cranetec way*'. Participants were aware of entering a new and partially unknown context. Comparing their prior experiences in other companies with their new employer they sometimes found themselves in a tension between adjusting or trying to shape the new setting.

2.1.2. INTERVIEWEES – SEASONED NEWCOMERS

I interviewed twelve employees over the course of a two-month period. The sample was drawn from Cranetec. Participants were all engaged in the induction process or had just finished it. Interviews typically lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. My choice of sample was led by judgement sampling (Marshall, 1996), which in this case suggests interviewing people who are going through the onboarding process at the moment and could therefore contribute best to the study. Also I checked for people already having some experience in the labour market and therefore the possibility to make comparisons to former working experiences. This is important as experienced newcomers are different from graduates undergoing onboarding and

my research question focuses on these specifically. Participants were chosen on the basis of the following five criteria:

- has more than 12 month of work experience outside current organisation
- has not worked for Cranetec before
- duration of membership in Cranetec of at least 3 months and at the most 14 months (enough experience to share while being able to remember)
- was accessible at the moment of the study

I interviewed three people selected by the personnel officers from each of the four main departments: business administration, production, construction and sales. Interviewees were selected from all four departments to show a variety of socialisation settings, as different “occupational groups may have specific cultures and generate different discourses that constitute the socialisation experience” (Barge & Schlueter, 2004).

The respondents had different levels of prior occupational experience ranging from one to 18 years. Participants’ age varied between 29 and 50 years. There were two female respondents. Age and gender were neglected in the study as the misbalance would not allow for making any connected assumptions.

I assured participants of confidentiality and no respondent was required to participate. Fortunately all employees I approached agreed to participate in the study.

2.2. Data Collection

I collected my data through semi-structured interviews. The interviews gave me the opportunity to get to know the employees’ stories, which can express their experiences, feelings and insights and help to reveal the underlying meaning of organisational socialisation during the onboarding process.

The interview questions were held as open as possible to motivate a free-floating conversation, which is more likely to disclose deeper feelings and truthful answers. However, I was aware that language rather constructs than mirrors a phenomenon and that narratives cannot be taken for granted (Alvesson, 2003). I used my observational notes and documents I was given (welcome brochures, onboarding schedules) to nurture a deeper understanding of the situational setting and a thick context for the analysis and interpretations.

I conducted all interviews in German. They were type-recorded with permission of the interviewee and transcribed afterwards. I translated relevant parts of the data into English to be used in the research report.

Participants of the study were first approached by the HR department via e-mail. Here they were informed of my study, the overall topic and the possibility to participate. After that I called each potential interviewee in order to schedule an appointment. I conducted ten interviews personally in conference rooms but as two participants were in Austria at that time, I did video interviews with them³.

I began each interview with broad questions to warm up and encourage the interviewee to narrate freely about their professional life before and with Cranetec. “What did you do before you came to Cranetec?” or “What was the onboarding process like?”, “How did you like it?” etc. As the interview progressed I asked for clarification of specific terms or topics. The question leading the conversations was “How did you experience the onboarding process?”. The question was deliberately broad to cover as many aspects of the issue as possible and encourage sense-making from the interviewee’s side. I took notes during the interviews to clarify my understanding of *how* participants talked about their experiences.

In order to gain participants’ trust I explained the purpose of my study thoroughly and gave them the opportunity to ask questions. However, I noticed that they were aware of the interview situation and the fact that they were being recorded. This showed in some interviews where as soon as the recorder was turned off more delicate information was shared. All in all, the participants were very friendly and seemed open and willing to help me with my study. Despite my close connection to the HR department and them still being on probation, they were also open to share critical thoughts on their induction and frustration with certain procedures.

2.3. Data Analysis

The semi-structured interview as a technique for interpretive data collection recognises the interview situation as an interactional act constituting an arena for negotiating meaning and understanding (Witzel & Reiter, 2012). Therefore I adopted an interpretive perspective to data analysis, aiming to understand the experience the newcomer gained during the onboarding process. The analysis was based on a hermeneutic approach and contained iteration through

³ As the video conference system offers real-time interaction and live video, I did not feel that the situation differed from a face-to-face interaction.

the data. I intended to study the meaning of socialisation during the onboarding process in its expression through narratives and reflections. I chose alethic hermeneutics as my technique of analysis. That is to say my understanding is marked by interpretation and preconception and puts emphasis on the process of understanding rather than the outcome itself (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

The documents and observation nurtured mostly the pre-understanding and understanding of the context. For analysing the collected data I used hermeneutic circles in which I moved back and forth between my pre-understanding and my text, which constituted my “interpretive prior knowledge, which needs to be explicated and ‘controlled’” (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 100). By engaging in a dialogue with the text I jumped from writing to reflecting. The data analysis was characterised by constant revision and iteration between my pre-conceptions, based on my academic background, my literature review and experiences I gained in the field, as well as my empirical data.

Initially I scanned the interviews for recurring keywords or phrases that seemed in the broadest sense to be related to my research question. Data collection and analysis happened simultaneously. I developed my interview framework iteratively as new insights occurred concurrently with data collection. During the analysis process I tried to suspend any judgment and put myself into the position of the interviewees. I kept asking the text questions about what it means that the interviewee answered the question this or that way (or not another way).

My next step was to form themes from meaning units, abstracted from the highlighted keywords in the interview text. I went through each text several times. With every round my understanding grew and facilitated deeper understanding of the written interview in front of me. I took my time for the analysis making sure to not miss important themes. My understanding of the topic grew with every additional case that I analysed as “every additional case is interpreted against the background of the cases before.” (Witzel & Reiter, 2012: 109).

I organized the condensed themes, e.g. ‘dependence on insiders’, ‘adjusting’, ‘bringing in expertise’ ‘dealing with resistance’, into a coherent framework still mirroring my empirical material in an honest fashion. I finalised my analysis by going through my themes, my text and iterate between my findings, theoretical framework and understanding of the issue. When I felt that no new meaning was emerging and my analysis was not getting any deeper I formed a concluding draft that united my pre-understanding, theoretical framework and findings of my empirical data.

2.4. Reliability, Reflexivity and Limitations

I had to be aware of the fact that “people tailor stories to their audience” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). I tried to explain my role as a researcher and not as HR management’s spy. Concerning authenticity, I expect that all interviewees who participated gave truthful accounts. Newcomers might still have deliberately restrained from answering in a critical way or unaware of their reactions to being asked ‘officially’ (Diefenbach, 2009) about their onboarding.

Through transcribing and especially by translating the interviews, I already constitute a form of interpretation and meaning. There are different readings of a transcript and more than one way of interpretation (Witzel & Reiter, 2012), as I conducted this study on my own there was, unfortunately, no opportunity for researcher triangulation. My interpretations are limited to my preunderstanding and theoretical reference which let me make sense of the interviewees’ accounts.

As the researcher I myself am part of the social world, I am studying (Alvesson, 2003). I cannot remove myself from the world to find ‘what really is’ (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). My personal self is inseparable from my researcher-self (Cresswell, 2003) and my presence in the interviews may bias the interviewees’ authenticity. Additionally me being part of the company may have affected my interpretations. I tried to be open and conscious about my own biases. It is important to be aware of my preunderstanding (experience, academic curriculum) and to reflect upon its impact.

However, as new knowledge “cannot be constructed from scratch” (Patterson, 2002: 23) and any interpretation of research material without a theoretical preunderstanding would “rest on shaky grounds.” (Alvesson, 2003: 14) my preunderstanding is nothing that I will avoid. By being reflexive I take account of the research process itself, including the situational nature of knowledge, the social context, my role as a researcher and the effects of language on the knowledge creation process (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley B., 2008).

All interviewees came from a single company, which constrains the generalizability of my statements. Due to the restructuring the company is undergoing some activities and experiences that interviewees shared might not be applicable to socialisation processes in general.

However, I believe that this unique case is very interesting and fruitful to study as it discloses aspects of socialisation that stay hidden in other settings.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic literature has paid a lot of attention to organisational socialisation in recent decades and branched out into various focus areas. The purpose of the following chapter is to introduce the reader to some valuable definitions and concepts, while focusing not only on general objectives of socialisation during the specific phase of onboarding, but specifically on the interrelation of seasoned newcomers' prior experiences and the new organisational context which consists of organisational practices, the organisational climate and socialisation agents (Wang et al, 2014).

In my study I aim to examine seasoned newcomers' experiences during their socialisation in a new organisational setting and how they find strategies for dealing with the perceived deviations of the new context from what they had experienced in their prior engagement. Accordingly my literature review will give a reasonable overview of the literature landscape and will then focus mainly on specifics of seasoned newcomers, characteristics of the organisational context and practices of dealing with contrast.

3.1. Wording: Onboarding and Socialisation

The thesis explores the process of onboarding. Onboarding is situated within the larger phenomenon of socialisation (Bauer, 2010) and is a practice oriented term (Ashforth & Nurmohamed, 2012) typically defined as the initial orientation process facilitating the socialisation of newcomers (Johnson & Senge, 2010). Onboarding occurs in relatively short and formally contained time periods whereas socialisation is a continuous learning process (Li, Harris, & Xie Zhitao, 2011). The literature agrees that socialisation describes the process in which the newcomer is transformed from an outsider into a functioning and participating insider (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Socialisation occurs whenever an individual crosses the boundaries between organisations or between particular groups of people within an organisation (Ashforth & Nurmohamed, 2012).

The vast literature landscape of this topic shows that there are many different ways to go on about the socialisation of newcomers, but no integrated theoretical model. Generally organisational socialisation means integrating the new employees into the present organisational pattern, while they are adjusting their individual identity (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011). The literature mostly agrees that organisational socialisation is a learning process situated at the individual, group and organisational level (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

In my study I will show how important this initial phase of socialisation during onboarding is for newcomers to decide upon future practices when dealing with contrast between their experiences and the new context. Onboarding has great relevance to set the stage for successful socialisation of the newcomer.

3.2. Socialisation Objectives

Organisational socialisation is meant to teach newcomer 'the ropes' of a particular organisational role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and "how to play the political game" (Korte, 2009: 285). Successful integration should lead to role clarity, task mastery, organisational knowledge⁴ for learning the tasks, social integration and, last but not least, social identification (Fang, Duffy, & Shaw, 2011). Management wants the onboarding process to pass on the company culture to the new hire (Daskalaki, 2012) and "mold newcomers into acceptable and efficient members" (Hart & Miller, 2006: 295). Often there is no active participation of the newcomers in the induction process as information is passed down unilaterally. Making newcomers feel part of the community is then executed by quick fix socialisation techniques (Daskalaki, 2012) such as standardised company presentations thus neglecting its importance and value for the whole organisation (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011). Management has an idealised view on the socialisation process which is highly influenced by popular management discourse assuming that newcomers will become a part of a uniform organisational culture (Daskalaki, 2012).

Many of the companies rely on standardised, best practice induction designs (Graybill et al., 2013), where the former experience of the newcomer and his or her own preunderstanding are seldom taken into consideration. Management perceives the onboarding process as characterised by compliance, accuracy and standardisation (Daskalaki, 2012). The weakness of most traditional perspectives is the assumption that organisational values and culture are something to be taught and adapted by new employees as part of the 'cultural indoctrination' (Graybill et al., 2013: 23), but these socialisation practices foster inauthentic behaviour and must not meet with employees subjective experience of culture in the organisation. As most of the onboarding process, including the organisational socialisation is standardised, Cable et

⁴ "Knowledge is multi-faceted and complex, being both situated and abstract, implicit and explicit, distributed and individual, physical and mental, developing and static, verbal and encoded." (Blackler, 1995: 1032–1033) This quote indicates the complexity of knowledge. The action of 'knowing' is seen as something individual which is pursued in a social context. It is assumed that implicit knowledge can be codified (e.g. by language) and hereby made explicit, and this way accessible for others (Newell et al., 2009).

al. (2013) warn that by not taking individuals' strengths and experience into consideration, important talent and innovative views might be lost due to company negligence.

3.2.1. ORGANISATIONAL TACTICS

Early socialisation models focused mostly on the role of the organisation (Ashforth & Nurmohamed, 2012) to which individuals 'become adjusted' (Lueke & Svyantek, 2000). The main goal of preparing the onboarding process in a technical as well as in an administrative way is for the newcomer to feel welcome. Especially administrative caretaking is important to reduce the newcomer's uncertainty and stress-level.

The organisation is responsible for feeding the newcomer with all the relevant information including all relevant knowledge of the specific job and the work setting (Carr et al., 2006). Therefore, tactics are what organisations do to socialise newcomers, so to say, shape them into knowledgeable agents acculturated to the new setting (Barge & Schlueter, 2004).

These organisational tactics can be separated into institutionalised and individualised socialisation tactics (Jones, 1986). Institutionalised tactics are collective, formal and sequential. These structured learning experience and clearly defined sequenced training activities help newcomers understand the formal guidelines, where to find resources and who to approach (Fang et al., 2011). These formal onboarding practices are said to be more effective concerning anxiety reduction than informal ones (Bauer, 2010) as Newcomers are more likely to acquire social capital being formally acquainted to a collective (Fang et al., 2011). It could be said that they set the stage for the newcomer to find orientation (Lueke & Svyantek, 2000). All in all, Ashforth et al. (1998) state that institutionalised tactics are positively related to newcomer adjustment to status quo.

Individualized socialisation, on the other hand, is defined as being informal, random and disjunctive. These tactics lead to ambiguous and unstructured socialisation experiences when role requirements and expectations are unclear. In this case the newcomer needs to be proactive and can shape his role and be more innovative (Fang et al., 2011).

However, both institutionalised and individual socialisation tactics are ends to a continuum and show us that the objectives of socialisation are twofold. On the one side, organisations require new employees to respect and emulate current practices, on the other side, organisations want newcomers to challenge and revise the way things are done (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006).

3.2.2. NEWCOMER PRO-ACTIVITY

In recent studies research has taken the newcomers' active participation in socialisation more into consideration. Newcomers experience high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty which is reduced by the information they get through various communication channels, mainly through social interactions with insiders (Fang et al., 2011). Other unwelcome aspects of the new situation are stress, surprise, anxiety, confusion, awkwardness (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006). The socialisation process aims to reduce anxieties on the newcomer's side about fitting in and performing well (Fang et al., 2011).

However, the new employee is not just exposed to the organisation's socialisation tactics. New employees' pro-active behaviour includes information-seeking and feedback-receiving (Bauer, 2010) to reduce these feelings of anxiety and ambiguity. Referring to Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) there are different groups of tactics the individual uses to 'survive' which are (1) 'gathering' as discovering and reflecting on information to improve understanding, (2) 'waiting' as to allow information to come and accept it as given as it is, and (3) 'following' guidance and take in advice.

As mentioned before the entry situation is characterised by high uncertainty. This can be reduced by the newcomer's efforts to understand organisational norms and expectations (Li et al., 2011) and research the new position thoroughly (Lueke & Svyantek, 2000). Newcomers use information seeking strategies and cognitive sense-making to incorporate the organisational environments and work roles into their prior knowledge (Carr et al., 2006).

Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) depicted a number of tactics the newcomer uses in interaction with insiders to deal with uncertainties in the socialisation process. These actions of mutual development are: (1) *Befriending*: establish social relations, wider scope as team, (2) *teaming*: putting effort into being seen as a team member to demonstrate commitment and influence how co-workers view the newcomer, (3) *exchanging*: trading resources with colleagues for preferred roles, (4) being aware of power relations, (5) *negotiating*: to discuss and agree on role expectations with colleagues, (6) *flattering*: make colleagues feel good, encourage self-disclosure, and (7) *talking*: picking up information in passing.

Part of this process is relationship building. Fang et al. (2011) state that proactive networking involves socialising with people in other departments and getting to know as many as possible in other organisational sections. Through sense-making the newcomer actively engages in various communication behaviours, information seeking and feedback seeking. However,

personality characteristics play an important role to which extent an individual uses proactive behaviour to influence his or her access to social resources (Fang et al., 2011)

These perspectives underlie the problem of focusing too much on the newcomer and his or her pro-active behaviour and power to shape the context. Context should not be neglected in the proactive process of information seeking and relationship building (Wang et al., 2014). It is not only interesting what tactics are used by the organisation, but how newcomers *perceive* organisational support (Lueke & Svyantek, 2000).

3.3. Interactive Socialisation

It has recently been acknowledged that socialisation does not happen in a vacuum. Above, I have shown how scholars tend to depict socialisation as a one-way street, either as something done by the organisation or as taken up by employees. The organisation is unable to determine how socialisation occurs by using specific tactics and newcomers, no matter how proactive they are, cannot shape the socialisation process on their behalf. If at all, socialisation seems to happen in between.

Organisations face newcomers who are not passive absorbers of workplace socialisation practices, as suggested above, but are actively engaged in sense-making (Carr et al., 2006). Wippich and Jöns (2001) state that even before officially entering the new organisation an ‘anticipatory socialisation’ already starts. The newly hired employee forms expectations towards the new employer. When entering the organisation the newcomer is confronted with reality and has to deal with upcoming surprise and disappointment. During the induction phase new hires figure out strategies to deal with the gap between expectation and reality. At this stage the individual starts negotiating his or her role within the organisation. With the following integration phase the newcomer gains new experiences and skills as a result of the organisational socialisation. The progress here is highly dependent on pre-knowledge and experiences (Wippich & Jöns, 2001).

In the following I will point to specifics of ‘the newcomer’ and ‘the insider’ as parties of the interaction in which socialisation occurs (Li et al., 2011).

3.3.1. SEASONED NEWCOMERS

Due to convenient access to (under)graduate student samples most of the research focuses on ‘neophyte’ workers (graduates), who are not only new to the organisation, but new to the occupation in general (Ashforth & Nurmohamed, 2012). Little is known how seasoned

workers, who bring experiences and pre-understanding from prior occupations, undergo the socialisation process (Beyer & Hannah, 2002) although Zahrly and Tosi (1989) suggest that early work role adjustment is influenced by previous work experience, early organisational experience and individual personality.

Of course, all newcomers bring some kind of prior experience into the new organisational setting, but as Beyer and Hannah (2002) suggest are work-related experiences likely to have a particularly strong effect on socialisation to the new work role and setting. Applying the same findings to veteran newcomers as to neophytes would be misleading. Previous work experiences seem to affect the onboarding process of an individual (Adkins, 1995; Beyer & Hannah, 2002; Saks et al., 2007) therefore neophyte and veteran newcomers should be differentiated. Carr et al. (2006) define experienced newcomers as organisational newcomers with prior working experience in the same occupation, who are likely to draw on prior experiences in the socialisation process. In this case, socialisation can be referred to as 're-socialisation' which means turning away from behavioural patterns of the former setting and adjusting to a new one (Adkins, 1995).

Carr et al. (2006) suggest that seasoned newcomers are better equipped to align their own values with the organisational values as they not only have experience in how they execute their job, but also in how to adapt to new environments and how to be successfully included. However, there is no such things as *the* seasoned newcomer and their socialisation is likely influenced by their total experience in an occupation and organisation and the work world in general (Saks et al., 2007).

3.3.2. ORGANISATIONAL INSIDERS AS MENTORS

Allen & McManus (1999) state that newcomers use established members actively through observation, interaction and communication. Peers are a valuable source of knowledge for newcomers who seek relevant information to gain an understanding of the relevant features of their new setting. The peer is viewed as having more wisdom and experience and is therefore used as a guide (Allen & McManus, 1999).

Organisational insiders play an important role in supporting newcomers to adjust effectively (Fang et al., 2011). Superiors can support links between newcomers and insiders through formal gatherings (Louis, 1980). Links between insiders and newcomers are beneficial as the newcomers can make more reality-based self-assessments through first-hand knowledge. Therefore access to insiders who are willing to speak "off the record" is crucial (Louis, 1980).

Co-workers can help newcomers learn social norms, organisational culture, task-related information and expected behaviours (Li et al., 2011) Increased interaction between insiders and newcomers such as small talk, serious discussions about one's career or orienting newcomers to their new environment makes newcomers feel less confused about their role (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006).

Role-modelling is based on informal relationships between newcomer and established members and "(...) represent[s] an important knowledge source for the newcomer." (Filstad, 2004: 397). Supervisor and co-worker behaviours help clarifying newcomers' conception of their work responsibilities (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006). Insiders can guide to important background information (Louis, 1980) and newcomers learn critical behaviour through the interpretations provided by insiders by chatting with newcomers, training them on specific work activities and spending time with them (Li et al., 2011).

The involvement in work related activities leads to immersion into the organisation's culture and gives the newcomer a sense of belonging and feelings of commitment (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006). The interaction with established members affects the socialisation of the newcomer and what s/he learns in relation to whom s/he learns from (Filstad, 2004) Also a mentor, whether formal or informal, increases opportunities for the newcomer to connect with other members of the organisation and supports the newcomer emotionally, by appraisal, informationally and instrumentally (Allen & McManus, 1999).

However, attitudes and behaviours of insiders can be supportive or not supportive and facilitate an environment for effective or ineffective socialisation (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006). I will tackle this issue later when I discuss how 'context' matters for the socialisation.

3.3.3. SOCIALISATION AS A LEARNING PROCESS

Filstad (2004) emphasises the importance to look at organisational onboarding as individual, social and cultural learning not only teaching technical skills. Knowledge is shared among the participants, as part of everyday experiences. Research should go "away from a view of learning as the accumulation of discrete skills and context-free knowledge toward a view of learning as the gradually increasing ability to participate in socially situated, collaborative practices"(Paré & Le Maistre, 2006: 365). This acknowledges the gradual transformation of neophyte into experienced practitioner and the newcomer's authentic but not critical participation in the workplace practice, which are the basis for collaborative actions and are reproduced in everyday activities (Romme et al., 2012).

Peer mentoring is positively related to socialisation-related learning (Slaughter & Zickar Michael J., 2006). As these relationships facilitate the exchange of information, and thereby newcomer's perceptions and interpretations, sanctions against information sharing among organisational members are counterproductive for newcomers' sense-making (Louis, 1980).

Of course, newcomers use non-interpersonal sources, e.g. written material and data bases and experimentation (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1993). Not all information required can be observed in others. Newcomers also have to trust themselves and make their own experiences. Learning by experience is very important so that newcomers find their own way of doing things. Newcomers need to gain their own experiences in order to develop tacit knowledge. This includes letting the newcomer be new (Filstad, 2004).

The transformation into an established organisational member occurs through active participation in the community's professional activities (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006). Expertise is not gained as a single individual's property through one-sided knowledge transmission, but workplace learning within the collaborative relationships. This suggests that both parties will gain knowledge and understanding. Learning during the socialisation process is based on reciprocity, which means conditions that lead to a mutually advantageous induction extending the capacities of both individual and organisation. However, this can only be facilitated by an open community to give newcomers space and opportunities to learn (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006).

3.4. Context Matters: Leave, Negotiate or Accept

A recent study by Wang et al. (2014) claims that context matters a lot. They emphasise that "[n]ewcomer socialisation is a process during which the newcomer interacts with the new environment." (Wang et al., 2014: 16). The newcomer adjustment takes place within the socialisation context. "[I]t is the newness of the 'change to' situation that requires adjustment" whether due to pleasant or unpleasant surprise (Louis, 1980: 235).

Lueke and Svyantek (2000) claim that "[w]hen a newcomer enters an organization, assumptions and observations about the similarities and differences between the new and old settings are made. The experience of a newcomer to an organization involves both surprise and sense making." (p. 386). Experienced workers actively participate in sense-making, seeking to maintain and enact their personal identity (Carr et al., 2006).

Therefore entering an organisational setting involves substantial (inter-)personal adjustment (Slaughter & Zickar, 2006). Understanding of actors, actions and situations is continuously

updated. In the meaning creation (sense-making) individuals rely on a number of inputs (past experiences, general personal characteristics, cultural assumptions and interpretive schemes) (Louis, 1980). There seems to be a continuum between adaption and pushing boundaries (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2012) that newcomers have to manage.

Holton (1996) suggests that veteran newcomers are more likely to seek to change their job environment than neophytes, because for them unlearning the lessons learned in their prior organisational entry is the hardest stage. Beyer and Hannah (2002) revealed in a qualitative study that newcomers past experiences affected their adjustment to a new working environment through personal tactics they had learned for managing change situations. This implicates that socialisation is not an end in itself, but prepares the employee to best serve the organisational goals. This must not be via adaption and adjustment but also by using their experience for improvement and giving them room to develop and be “their best selves” (Cable et al., 2013). Wang et al. (2014) claim that this room can be looked upon as the context consisting of formal organisational practices, climate⁵ (e.g. for innovation or cooperation) and ‘socialisation agents’ (e.g. superiors and co-workers) have an impact not only on socialisation content, but the actual process as well.

3.5. Summary and Theoretical Analysis

“In order to understand the processes by which newcomers cope with entry and socialization experiences, we must first understand that experience.” (Louis, 1980: 235)

Empirical studies following Van Maanen and Schein (1979) on socialisation have been conducted since 1980, but mainly in psychology-based literature (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010) focusing on quantitative data to conclude with directed causalities. These quantitative studies most often examine distal outcomes of the socialisation process, e.g. job satisfaction, organisational commitment, performance, and turnover (Bauer et al., 2007), but not the process and its complexity itself.

⁵ “Climate is defined as a perceptually based description of what the organization is like in terms of practices, policies, procedures, and routines while culture helps define the underlying reasons and mechanisms for why these things occur in an organization based on fundamental ideologies, assumptions, values, and artifacts.” (Ostroff et al., 2003: 565)

These results are strongly managerial oriented and mainly used to make assumptions about the effectiveness of specific variables in the onboarding process (Bauer, 2010), but do not lead to a deeper understanding of how and why. The meaning of these ‘factors’ to the individual stays hidden.

Even though there has been a vast amount of articles being written and studies conducted within the topic of organisational socialisation, they often take a rather functionalist stance and look for potential of improvement or correlations rather than deep understanding. Korte (2009) emphasises the need for further investigation on the experience of the individual and its responsibility to take action within the socialisation process. This lack of qualitative studies dealing with the topic of onboarding and socialisation points to a major gap in understanding the experiences of job changers undergoing another onboarding process and adapting to a new organisational setting while trying to align their own expectations, experiences and identity to the new conditions.

More recent research focuses on the individual with his or her individual experiences and shows that newcomers are not all green, but knowledgeable and sophisticated (Stephens & Dailey, 2012). Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2013) point to the need for further research investigating on the pre-entry experiences of newcomers and their pro-active behaviour within the onboarding process. Daskalaki (2012) suggests that "(...) induction could be reconceptualised as a process that enhances knowledge sharing, challenges dominant assumptions, and allows individuality and creativity to guide organisational change and development." (p. 107). Therefore adjustment should be embedded in new frameworks based on diversity, sophistication and dialogue. Also a change of perspective towards socialisation within interactions between newcomers, co-workers and managers suggests an understanding of learning based on mutual sense-making in contrast to standardised one-way communication (Korte, 2009).

As Wang et al. (2014) suggest it should be acknowledged that “Newcomers provide fresh perspectives to the organizations and play a crucial role in determining the future development of the organizations.” (p. 15) However, it is neither the newcomer nor the organisations who determines how socialisation occurs. Focusing on one-sided learning does not pay the actual complexity of socialisation justice. Rather it needs to be acknowledged how the multi-faceted context of socialisation enables and restrains practices the newcomer develops to deal with discrepancies between their experience and the new organisational setting.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will outline my empirical findings and analyse them by taking an interpretative approach. My main focus was to understand how seasoned newcomers⁶ experience their socialisation in relation to their prior knowledge during the onboarding process at Cranetec. How did interviewees talk about getting to know the new setting and deal with tensions between their former work experiences and the new work setting?

My analysis chapter is structured around the main finding that (1) the knowledge exchange during the onboarding phase is controlled by co-workers. Co-workers act as gatekeepers for (a) giving access to internal knowledge and (b) possibilities for bringing external knowledge into the organisation. Newcomers experience their onboarding process in the tension of adjusting to the new context while attempting to bring in their prior experiences. In response to co-workers acting as gatekeepers (2) newcomers (a) hold back expertise. Yet, (b) after a certain time 'newcomers' become pro-active and seek to change their environment.

4.1. Are Seasoned Newcomers just as 'Green'?

Regardless of their prior experiences newcomers were curious to find out how things were handled the 'Cranetec way'. Participants were aware of entering a new and partially unknown context. They showed high motivation and gratefulness for getting the opportunity to become part of a new organisation.

Nevertheless, when transitioning to a new organisation seasoned newcomers naturally start to compare before and now. Participants in this study pointed out several salient differences between their prior organisation and Cranetec such as working procedures, social interactions or cultural aspects. When differences are identified newcomers will evaluate which option seems superior to them and either take it in or try to change the new setting.

Adjustment was less related to the actual job and the technical skills, but more to the new context in which the actual work is embedded. Newcomers feel quite secure about doing their work, but feel that the new setting deviates from what they were used to. When I asked newcomers whether it was a big reorientation for them to come to a new company, they often told me that the actual job is the same or similar at least, but "*everything around the actual work that was a huge readjustment*" (Hoffmann).

⁶ In the following I will refer to 'seasoned newcomers' when I talk about 'newcomers'.

Seasoned newcomers experience organisations as a process of readjustment. As seasoned newcomers bring in quite specific concepts of organisational life their socialisation is a struggle between letting go and relearning. Some of their practices and customs were applicable, while others were not.

After they entered the company newcomers engaged into finding out what knowledge is fitting and what they would need to readjust. Even though job descriptions are similar there are always nuances in the way they are actually executed. Newcomers had to engage in the ‘Cranetec way’ of doing things.

“I mean, I know a lot from my former job, but still a lot of things are handled differently.” (Koch)

Newcomers therefore looked for deviations to what they already know about how their job is executed. What did not match was identified as being *firm specific and that’s something you don’t know in the beginning* (Wagner). Readjustment is about learning what is different. Being an engineer in company XY differs from being an engineer at Cranetec.

“When I started working here I kind of had to reset myself. (...) You have to check what you can actually use from your repertoire of experience, what more you need now. Are there parallels? Can I use my prior knowledge?” (Schulz)

Interviewees ‘checked’ what was alike and what was different and gave thick description of their learning and adjustment experience. They are no blank pages when they come to Cranetec, but what is written on them may not be readable now. Their onboarding does not start in the primordial soup of their occupation. Still seasoned newcomers had to face that they would need to engage in learning and to a certain extent adjusting to the ‘Cranetec world’.

“Otherwise you walk through the company with your knowledge from your former company and think you know how it’s working but then you notice it doesn’t fit.” (Koch)

Seasoned newcomers may know a lot, but they have to be very careful not to think that this means they are done. The extent of learning in a standardised way may be limited, but learning the ‘firm specific way’ only happens through understanding what is in their colleagues’ heads. Newcomers have to get access to their co-workers experiences. Due to the

one-sided dependency a power relation establishes which is not based on hierarchical differences, but informal attributions between ‘the wise mentor’ and the ‘new kid’, co-workers hold the position of controlling knowledge exchange and thereby determine the content of newcomer socialisation.

Knowledge is shared on the interactional level. However, there is no objective ‘Cranetec way’ of doing things ‘out there’. Veteran insiders, who have incorporated the firm specific practices and procedures, teach their mentees their interpretation of how things are done. Newcomers themselves will make sense of this individually. Adjustment then means finding common ground in individual sense-making.

4.2. Newcomers’ Dependence on Gatekeepers

4.2.1. SEEKING TO FIT IN

It was a widely shared conception throughout the interviews that learning the nuances that make the work the ‘Cranetec way’ cannot be learned through standardised training on technical skills alone. From the insights of the former section concerning how adjustment occurs, it can be stated: Co-workers control knowledge exchange in the socialisation of newcomers. This control is exerted in two ways: (1) co-workers regulate the knowledge flow and (2) discipline newcomers for violations of this control.

As it is their personal knowledge newcomers are seeking, co-workers decide on what to share and more importantly what not to share with the alien newcomer. While general ideas and experiences of success are willingly shared with strangers, co-workers may restrain from telling newcomers about occasions of failure and discomfort which are as important for the learning experience.

Newcomers were encouraged to find out what knowledge they were lacking and to fill these gaps by being pro-active in their socialisation and seek insider knowledge.

“You are responsible for yourself. Nobody prepares everything for you. You yourself have to become active. If you don’t ask you don’t get the information.”

(Fischer)

Yet it may be hard to ask about things that one does not know yet. It can be questioned whether newcomers are aware of the right questions to ask. Therefore they need to rely on co-workers willingness to share knowledge beyond their questioning.

Learning the ropes was highly based on the interactions and less on formal learning.

“Most interesting during the first weeks was less learning the technical facts but that colleagues told us about their projects in the past and the wild years at Cranetec when everything started here and how they experienced that. And then everybody has a tip for what to do and what to leave.” (Meyer)

Learning the ropes is informal. Gaining access to insiders’ experiences occurs primarily on a personal level as part of getting to know the opposite.

“I’m a notorious questioner. Sometimes I asked the same questions several times, but I always felt welcome and never got the feeling that I was a burden.” (Schäfer)

The willingness to share information and experiences produces a climate for adjustment. The perception of a culture for knowledge exchange was valued a lot because people knew they were dependent on getting access to ‘insider knowledge’ to become established members of the organisation.

“It was important to me that the culture how knowledge is transferred, how they share their expertise and exchange experiences with co-workers was as open“ (Wagner)

But not only are newcomers dependent on their colleagues to answer their specific questions, but on their willingness to share their work experiences without holding relevant information back. It cannot be taken for granted that just because a newcomer is ‘proactive’ and is seeking information, the sought information is provided. Co-workers have the power to control firm specific knowledge and thereby enable or restrain the newcomer’s success in adjusting to the new setting and bringing in their own expertise as they become aware of potential for optimisation.

Firm specific knowledge and ‘ways to handle things’ are negotiated between the newcomer and the peer group – his or her colleagues. Socialisation occurs in interaction.

„You adjust a lot just by interacting with people on a regular basis. Especially in my job, where I have contact to many different departments. You just grow into the culture.“ (Schäfer)

Newcomers can only compare what ‘was’ and what ‘is’ and make sense of it by building relationships to co-workers and depending on their willingness to exchange vital information they would need to do their job the way it will be expected of them down the road.

Schäfer also indicates that relevant knowledge does not only come from co-workers of the same department, but that ‘growing into the culture’ is related to knowing the company beyond the department’s fence. Therefore new hires used relevant co-workers cross-functionally as role models, which they can observe, communicate and interact with so they would understand the big picture.

“I think it’s good that the onboarding phase is so long. This way one can learn more from seasoned co-workers and how the ‘Cranetec world’ functions so one can get a feeling for the stable.” (Koch)

Note Koch’s interest is in discovering how the ‘Cranetec world’ functions, rather than the more technical aspects of the new job. It indicates that some newcomers’ wish to become adjusted and move quickly from being an outsider to insider. Newcomers are aware that only co-workers can provide the sought knowledge. The newcomer cannot influence the pace they learn but depend on their co-workers availability. Newcomers are put in a relationship of dependency.

‘There was this informal concept that you always had somebody an arm-length from you, something like a mentor with whom you could talk about these specific things. In my case that was theoretically to be Paul, but practically he was on business trips a lot and never there. That was a bit difficult.’ (Meyer)

Not everyone was pleased with being dependent on co-workers to gain these insights. Some newcomers were frustrated due to the lack of formalised guidance they were given. It occurred to them that they were very dependent on their colleagues’ knowledge and willingness to share information at all times. The dependence of gaining relevant knowledge through colleagues is perceived as being pleasant only to a certain extent.

“You had to know whom to ask if you needed some information. I was definitely missing some documentation where you can check things for yourself and you don’t need to know whom to ask.” (Weber)

Newcomers lose autonomy in their socialisation and the power to decide upon when and what to learn. Also, by asking insiders for information and explanation newcomers cannot hide their deficits. Socialisation thereby becomes a transparent process. It puts emphasis on the informal power relation between the insider, who possesses the information sought by the newcomer, who, despite his corpus of experience, is inferior.

Adjustment to a context as Cranetec which showed how willingly knowledge and experience was shared with newcomers did not seem to be a big deal to newcomers who already knew the basics of their job. It shows that socialisation is only to a minor extent about learning the actual job. However, newcomers cannot make accounts on the knowledge that was not shared by insiders. Learning about the '*Cranetec world*' involved both newcomers and insiders to negotiate a climate of interaction.

“A lot of the knowledge is in people’s heads, because a lot of the employees have been here for a long time and they know then what they’ve got to do.”
(Weber)

As a lot of the company knowledge is tacit knowledge it is difficult for newcomers to specifically ask for it. Newcomers have to rely on their co-workers' ability to verbalise relevant knowledge. By following insiders around and asking questions they get a feeling for how the job is done at Cranetec. By doing the job themselves at early stages in their onboarding they actually experience what cannot just be explained and showed. Despite the fact that a formal onboarding process exists, employees do not feel that they learn until they are embedded in informal relationships with their colleagues and thrown into experiencing the job in cooperation with their colleagues. The '*Cranetec way*' is mediated by insiders who reproduce '*their way*' in their interaction with newcomers. Getting a newcomer on board cannot happen in isolation.

Seasoned newcomers noticed that not all doors are open for them to pass as they please. While insiders were very gracious to show newcomers how everything is, this was mainly intended to secure the status quo and make newcomers adjust and fit in.

It is important to keep in mind that experienced newcomers are no blank pages. Socialisation occurs referring to '*before*'. In the beginning newcomers focused on learning how things are in the company, but sooner or later newcomers experienced a tension between how things '*are*' and how they '*could be*', based on contrasting now and before. Through the stories newcomers told me about these occasions in their onboarding, they showed how they made

sense of deviances between their prior experience and the new status quo through interaction with organisational insiders. The socialisation of seasoned newcomers is defined by a tension between adjustment, as learning and adapting to the firm specific way and seeking inclusion, and standing out by shaping the new context.

4.2.2. ATTEMPTS TO STAND OUT

Whenever newcomers are confronted with ‘newness’ or deviations in the new setting, sense-making occurs as a function of prior impressions. In my interviews I asked newcomers whether they sometimes had the feeling that they know better how to handle things due to their prior experience. Interviewees gave different accounts on that depending on their judgement of the ‘betterness’ of their experience in relation to the ‘Cranetec way’.

There were newcomers who preferred to adjust themselves to the new setting without pushing for change. Wagner, for example, told his co-workers about differences between his experience and the approach taken at Cranetec. Newcomers voice distinctions between their prior experience and status quo in interactions. Through their co-workers reaction and reasoning in favour of the status quo, newcomers make sense of and evaluate the current situation. Depending on whether newcomers perceive their co-workers reasoning as convincing, newcomers will adapt to the status quo.

“Sometimes I mentioned that at my former job we did it like this or that but usually I came to the conclusion that here they have better solutions. (...) I prefer to respect how far people came already and to transfer this knowledge to Germany.” (Wagner)

While his first sentence showed signs of negotiating, which way was the better one, he ended with stating that he prefers to transfer the knowledge he gained in Austria, without alterations to Germany, due to his respect for their solutions not their superiority. This implies that he was not willing to bring himself in as much as others were and stopped where his colleagues guarded status quo.

There is a great risk of intimidating newcomers to not contribute openly with their own ideas and rather burry them as good memories. The potential for innovation may get lost due to insiders reluctance to do more than necessary. Since peers control knowledge exchange, they may keep the gates for insider knowledge to be transferred to newcomers wide open, while stopping external knowledge to pass into the organisation and thereby changing ‘their way’.

“Sure, if you have something that works, that’s great. But why not make it even better?”(Becker)

Not all newcomers were as willing to accept how things were handled. Becker talked about some things he remembered differently at his former organisation and voiced his concerns about a situation towards his colleagues:

“And my colleagues once told me ‘You should not keep a sharp eye on that.’ And I still think ‘They cannot be serious!’(...) I sometimes tell myself ‘Well, okay I don’t really get this 100%...’ I know this in a different way.” (Becker)

In this case Becker had sought for information why something was handled in a specific way. The response he got from his colleagues was not sufficient in convincing him that this was better than how he was used to it being managed. This suggests that he could not make sense of it on his own and therefore consulted insiders in his environment whom he expected to know the meaning of why this is handled in this particular way. Obviously, he was let down. His colleagues’ sense-giving could not provide him with enough reasoning to change his mindset. Here the mediation of meaning through the interaction with insiders did not result in adjustment. Becker perceived ‘what is’ as being inferior to what he was used to from prior experiences and insiders could not prepare him with explanations why their approach was purposeful in the context of Cranetec. Instead Becker will stick to his former experiences in making sense of the situation. He does not adjust, but will try to make alterations to the context. The tension between newcomer’s prior understanding and the new setting could not be resolved through adjustment or modifying the status quo.

I will tackle the implications of co-workers blocking newcomers’ attempts for alteration in the next section. I will show newcomer’s strategies towards situations, in which insiders’ attempts to incorporate newcomers with their way of handling things did not lead to successful sense making and results in newcomers seeking to change the status quo which they do not approve.

Does this mean ‘No entry’ for newcomers to the arena of change? Newcomers referred in their stories to various occasions in which they were of the opinion that the way they know how to do things was superior to how they learned it at Cranetec. While insiders kept the gate for seeking information open, newcomers had to recognise that gates for pro-active ‘suggestion-giving’ were often closed or at least strongly guarded. Here the power struggle between being the new one and an old hand becomes most obvious.

“Well, I guess, either you are open to adjust to a new setting, then there’s no problem and you can go with the flow, or you have to try to shape it to fit you. But that is something you have to do cooperatively.”(Koch)

Koch points out what other participants have explained as well. Socialisation happens in cooperation with relevant peers. Co-workers have to give their ‘go’ and buy in, in order for newcomers to bring themselves in by questioning and critiquing their colleagues’ practices.

Newcomers’ accounts varied as to how they perceived a climate for alterations and change due to their interaction with different co-workers. It seems there was no overall culture to be identified. Each newcomer had to find out through interacting with different peers where the ‘gos’ and ‘stops’ are for him or her to navigate between adjustment and exertion of influence. I asked interviewees whether they tried to shape the setting.

*“Yes, but I have mentioned already a couple of things. Here that’s like tilting at windmills. There are some ideas for optimisation, improvements, which I know from my prior occupation - some things that can be handled more efficiently. And the colleagues I am working with...well...I don’t know whether they sometimes just don’t want any changes. It is difficult. I often talked myself blue in the face. But ‘no’. Along the lines of ‘We’ve always done it like this. That’s good as it is.’”
(Becker)*

Co-workers can block newcomers’ attempts to bring in their own expertise. Newcomers’ suggestion to modify procedures are critiquing the current way and ranking co-workers course of action as inferior, which is not always welcome.

It is intriguing to see how more experienced newcomers (concerning the variety of jobs they have done) can handle these underlying politics very well in contrast to some ‘greener’ newcomers’ struggle to deal with power relations adequately. In their accounts the latter did not show an awareness of how important the right framework of relationships and peer support is for them to negotiate their position and working environment. Fischer told me about an occasion when he had learned the hard way that one should know his or her rank.

“Apparently I had tackled the problem in a too aggressive manner and one or two people felt stepped on their toes, so that I was summoned to the chief executive to discuss the issue. He then made an appeal to me which really was a

shot across the bows. Seriously, it was something like 'Pull yourself together and be satisfied with what you get.'" (Fischer)

It could be suggested that not having learned how different companies are and never having experienced a change of setting had left the newcomer rather naïve. Although he had the technical knowledge of conducting his work, he was not aware of the underlying contextual aspects and politics. He came to notice that there is more to pushing for alterations than presumably logical reasons. It comes down to co-workers granting access.

Opportunities for bringing in their own expertise opened up in situation not controlled by co-workers. For example some newcomers gained positions that were new to the organisation and therefore not embedded in fixed structures.

"I was surprised because I thought there would be more standards by the parent company. But on the other hand, it was not too bad as a lot of things were just not there. That means you could establish a lot of things yourself and participate actively." (Weber)

Within this context of 'a new start' in Germany newcomers were hopeful to build a network of relationships where all departments work closely together without '*pulling up walls*'. They perceived the change process and its fluid nature as an opportunity to be part of '*building the company from the grounds*', which is interesting as the company exists for more than 10 years. But building their own department and being there '*from the beginning*' seemed to make this alteration their responsibility. This perceived climate of active participation and role innovation, rather than passive adjustment to an established setting, fostered their belief to have the power to change the setting.

"Here in Germany we have the chance to bring in our own experiences and expertise, because we are new and establish [the department]. So if you don't do it now, step by step, you won't be able to do it later. At least, it will be a lot harder. But that's something I'm really looking forward to, which is going to be fun and an opportunity to bring in my own experiences." (Koch)

This shows that newcomers feel reluctant to just adapt to the context and make the same mistakes they had identified with their co-workers, but were motivated to go further, and do it better. It seemed being a rebel and going for revolutionising the culture was only

possible detached from relationships that had historically grown into a fixed network of ‘how things are done’.

Newcomers had opposing perceptions of what the new organisational setting offers to them. The newcomers came from different departments and subunits. This means they were embedded in relationships to various insiders who drew them a picture of the status quo. While some were convinced that the specific situation opens up space for them to shape the structures, others had the feeling that change was not appreciated during these unstable times.

“I think their objective of induction is to copy what has been established in Austria and transfer this without loss to Germany. That’s why people are sent to Austria, to learn the craft (...) and that they just have to move them geographically.” (Meyer)

There is no consensus about co-workers reach of control. Newcomers have a set of expectations that are connected to the unique situation the organisation is in. Because they do not come into ready-made structures they do not feel as if they would have to adjust to what they are taught in Austria, but can build their own setting. On the other side this also suggests that newcomers are aware of the fact that coming to an established workplace does not offer these opportunities.

“I just hope that we can bring what we learned in Austria to Germany, like the mentality and stuff. I hope this will not be torpedoed too much. I can give you a nice example: There was an occasion when three Austrian colleagues had a coffee break and a HR guy from Germany came along. (...) He was very confused how they could just stand there sipping coffee and chatting. It’s outrageous!” (Fischer)

The newcomer found himself in the position of the observer of cultural differences. As a newcomer mentioned they sometimes feel like a ‘Half-man’ not being ‘German’ nor ‘Austria’ (Koch). They were in the unique position of experiencing differences from what they were used to and becoming aware of these. Instead of being ‘confused’ about Austrian habits [participants suggested this must be down to the national culture] they learned to understand them, make sense of them. As they knew that co-workers in Germany had different views of

‘coffee breaks’ they were afraid of their veteran co-workers to ‘torpedo’ their attempts for change.

Although insiders seemed to be very willing to share their knowledge and experience some felt reluctant to take in suggestions for improvement from the external ‘new ones’. Rebels who were highly motivated to voice their concerns or make suggestions for improvement were put in their place.

“I spoke up, maybe a bit too loud, and, as I said, got a shot across the bows. Although I don’t think that’s the right message either. To me it suggests ‘Boy if you have a problem, do not speak up otherwise you get into trouble.’” (Fischer)

When newcomers found themselves in situations, which they could not influence they had to make a decision. During these interactions in which they tried to bring their ideas in, they perceived what climate for bringing oneself in was like. Neglecting co-workers’ power to control leads to being disciplined.

“That’s the impression I got from what I experienced here. At the moment [restructuring] they don’t want change. On the contrary I have the feeling that people who are willing to make suggestions get squashed. I myself gained this experience. ‘That’s how we do it and we’ve always done it like this!’ Seriously that’s the slogan. Related to this onboarding phase.” (Meyer)

Meyer’s account reflects frustration as he himself had experienced being rejected. It shows that he is talking about the restructuring phase in which new departments are built, in particular. While his colleague argued that this very contextual variable would open up opportunities for bringing in their own expertise, Meyer had perceived it the opposite way. He, however, cannot identify the company’s wish to use their newcomers’ expertise as a resource at the moment. Co-workers act as gatekeepers for external knowledge to enter the company. Their power not only to block, but also to discipline newcomers has implications for their prospective attempts to share their expertise.

“To use seasoned newcomers’ experiences in this situation, like they have the idea ‘Hey let’s do it like this, this is better.’ That’s not demanded at all. I can’t imagine that they aim for this at the moment. (Meyer)

Due to this unique situation in which experienced employees are sent to another site (Austria) to be onboarded and then come back to the actual work setting (Germany) is a bit confusing, but it tells us a lot about how people deal with the presumed conflict of their experiences, and their wish for not only adjusting to a new setting, but actively shaping the new context to their preferences. It shows how much learning and changing are based on contextual factors and the role of interaction with insiders who have the power to accept alteration or stop it. The perception of whether this situation implicates an arena for change or reproducing status quo depends on the interactions newcomers engaged in.

Now this does of course not suggest that newcomers come in and only want to stand out and bring in their own expertise. On the contrary, seasoned newcomers want to adjust and become a part of the new setting. Inclusion and identification were always voiced as the main goal of their socialisation. However, they aim to do so by remaining true to themselves. To handle their colleagues' stop signs towards alterations, newcomers look for ways to navigate between accepting and adjusting as well as shaping and bringing in their expertise.

4.3. Dealing with the Dependence on Gatekeepers

Basically there are two way to handle the dependence on co-workers control of knowledge exchange. Newcomers can either (a) de-couple the knowledge transfer from their colleagues by using formalised sources of knowledge, e.g. documentation or (b) engage in building tight relationships to neutralise the power misbalance.

4.3.1. STRUGGLING WITH THE ARBITRARINESS OF INFORMATION ACCESS

Sharing information through rather informal interactions bares the risk of some newcomers not getting enough information or at least not the same kind. Especially critical knowledge, e.g. about other people's failures may not be shared as willingly in the initial phase of the newcomer's entrance. Here relationships to co-workers are still rather superficial. This shows how co-workers control of the knowledge exchange and power to hold back knowledge does not only enable but also restrain newcomers' adjustment.

Formal frameworks like official project meetings depict an arena for sharing even delicate information in a de-personalised way. Experiences of failure (*we share our experiences on what went well and especially what did not*, Meyer), which are as important for learning as success stories become neutral reports instead of justifications. Formal frameworks provide an

arena for knowledge sharing independent of relationships to co-workers and thereby circumvent co-workers' control.

It is problematic that *people have the knowledge in their heads* (Weber). Especially tacit knowledge may be taken for granted by its carrier. Most newcomers voiced that learning from colleagues is great, but not sufficient. Formalised access to knowledge like documentations can de-couple learning from co-workers, *so people can deal with it independently* (Weber).

As bringing in ideas was often experienced as being limited by colleagues, newcomers voiced that it may need an *'administrative idea management'* (Becker) so one would not need to wonder whom to talk to and how to handle personal resistance. Whenever newcomers initially struggle with the dependence on their colleagues a formal framework that de-personalises their attempt to either gain knowledge or give expertise provides remedy. Here the insiders' control of knowledge exchange is resolved through the use of formal frameworks.

4.3.2. DON'T BITE THE HAND THAT'S FEEDING YOU WITH KNOWLEDGE

Newcomers faced the fact that there will always be things that do not make sense to them and for which they will not find any satisfying explanation nor will they be able to change them. Newcomers show signs of resignation concerning their power to influence the setting.

"There are just things which are as they are. In every company in every unit there are fixed procedures and policies." (Schmidt)

When being asked whether they tried to contribute with their own ideas, one participant found quite clear words. He had learned in interactions with co-workers that they guarded their way. Suggesting to old-timers how to handle things differently was met with a clear stop sign. You can learn about the *'Cranetec world'* but be careful to question what they have built. Co-workers act as gatekeepers of the status quo and enforce stability.

There were some occasions when we thought 'Okay, we would handle this differently' but then it was always the argument 'We've done it this way for 20 years.' So you take note of it and that's how it is." (Müller)

Newcomers respond to co-workers' control of knowledge exchange by holding back expertise. If newcomers perceive co-workers to block external knowledge passing the company gates, newcomers generally restrain from bringing themselves in.

Newcomers perceive the climate for alteration in different ways. Some had to learn the hard way, maybe due to a lack of experience in how to handle these issues, that bringing in oneself is not always as welcome as one had expected.

“I think on one side my prior experiences helped me, but on the other side I think I entered the company with too concrete ideas of how it should be. I alienated some people by demanding and expecting things, which were common practice in my former company, but which were very different here. So I had to step back from what I was used to.” (Fischer)

Contributing in the early stages of one’s entrance seems to be a delicate issue. The rather young and loose relationships to colleagues are highly stressed by newcomers’ attempts to change status quo. People have to find strategies of how to deal with this situation. As Fischer’s case shows he did not consider the climate for change and was rebuked. However, in some cases newcomers just accepted that their co-workers could block their feedback and that there was not a lot they could do about it.

“You can only make an offer to people. It is just sad that you have ideas and always meet resistance.” (Becker)

How to deal with this misbalance of power strongly depends on relationships, which newcomers can only assess in interactions with established members of the organisation. Some attempts for improvement as mentioned above are just not accepted. Common reactions to things that could not be altered by the newcomer were:

“If you talk to a co-worker or your superior and they always say ‘We’ve always been doing it like this.’ Then you tell yourself eventually ‘Then that’s how it is. Because it was always like this.’ And that’s how you pass this on to the next generation.” (Becker)

Newcomers’ resignation leads to them holding back their expertise in the initial phase of socialisation.

“I think one has to find the right balance. I think one should not try too hard to optimise everything from the very beginning. I think then you run risk to alienate people if you think you know how to do everything better. I think one has to be

very sensitive and know when to take an active role, and when to restrain yourself and tell yourself: 'Okay, that's how it is. I just have to adjust myself.'
(Weber)

Newcomers experience the tension between fitting in and standing out through the interaction with gatekeepers. How much newcomers can shape procedures depends on gatekeepers' decision to hold up their 'go' or 'stop' signs. Newcomers' socialisation also depends to a great extent on how gatekeepers manage the access to knowledge and experiences. Therefore newcomers engaged actively into building relationships with them to keep these gates open.

"If cooperation works on a personal level, you can easily make it work at the professional level. If you don't have any personal contact, it is way harder."
(Koch)

There are different qualities of relationships. It shows that newcomer's need not only become pro-active concerning seeking information but also in building relationships and gaining their colleagues' acceptance. Only after a certain time, when newcomers feel accepted in their work group, 'newcomers' responses to their peers control became pro-active and they sought to change the status quo.

"It's conducive if you know the engineers, technical office and so on. It's a mutual understanding that's necessary, and then you naturally make agreements. (...) It's important to bring people out of their shell." (Koch)

Pulling walls down and get to know co-workers relevant to the newcomer's working context seem to be of major importance to come by resistance and make the attempt to change practices or procedures as a cooperative rather than an individual project.

As another participant says, it is important to know the current processes. It is necessary to have an understanding of not only what and how things are handled in a specific way but also why they are done as so in this specific environment. Adjusting and bringing in expertise are mutually interrelated.

"As soon as you've got a basic understanding of the processes, procedures and everything concerning your work tasks, then you're ready to contribute with your own ideas." (Schulz)

Newcomers were aware of how to play the political game.

“I think one is well advised to observe first and not until you really comprehend the procedures and policies and how things are handled here, at the appropriate time, you suggest how things could be done more efficiently, better or faster. Being too ambitious in that regard maybe negatively perceived by colleagues.”
(Schäfer)

Waiting for ‘the appropriate time’ could point to the importance of a specific frame or, as I explained earlier, context of relationships. The interviewees’ accounts showed that one has to be careful when giving critical feedback and provide suggestions as this might come across like ‘You’re doing it wrong.’

As one participant mentioned it is important to ‘*respect how far the company has come so far*’. It is people one deals with when interfering with intentions for change. A company can write into their values that it is innovative, but as long as people do not practice this culture for change, newcomers will not perceive it and adapt to it. Fresh newcomers may be stopped by their own attitude not to bite the hand that’s feeding them with relevant knowledge.

“Of course, we refrained from that [telling people how to do things in a better way]. (...) especially in this situation where you take their knowledge and then say ‘good bye’.”
(Müller)

This shows that even though not hierarchically, but informally there is a power gradient between newcomer and insider.

“By now, the longer you are with the company and the more experience you gain and the more you understand how the system works, the easier it is and the more self-confidence you get to address problems or to make suggestions.”
(Müller)

Resulting from the experiences the seasoned newcomers gained in the new ‘field’ opportunities to shape the setting grow. This means that the further newcomers get to be insider, the easier it is to bring themselves in. This suggests that standing out, as a newcomer, no matter how experienced one is, is always tricky. Newcomers need to lose their ‘newness’ and seek inclusion to bring in their expertise.

There is no objective climate for change affinity at Cranetec. This became apparent as newcomers had very different interpretations of whether they can navigate or had to go with the flow. How newcomers deal with situations, in which they are of the opinion that something could be approached differently and in a better way, depends strongly on the climate that is mediated through the relationships with relevant insiders.

Seasoned newcomers actively use relationships with insiders to pursue change. The account below depicts how important their network is for newcomers to not only seek information in the socialisation process, but to bring in their own expertise.

“Changing structures around here is nothing that happens overnight - and then it works. It is usually a project that you have to implement step by step. Of course here it is beneficial to know everybody involved and to know how they’re wired. It involves a lot of mutual understanding.” (Koch)

Newcomers appreciate that knowing how people are ‘wired’ helps when negotiating possibilities for alteration and change. After all it is people they negotiate practices with, who have their preferences and their individual understanding of things. Newcomers had to navigate around insiders’ reluctance to change, which was only possible by getting to know their opposites and engage in cooperative negotiations.

“Then, when you arrived there and you are respected and accepted, then you can share your own ideas and suggestions.” (Schäfer)

Insiders’ power to hold up their ‘stop sign’ in interactions and block newcomers’ suggestions for improvement can not only affect the immediate interaction in which the negotiation takes place. Following attempts for bringing themselves in suffer from their perception of a general culture for innovation and improvement.

How well newcomers are able to enforce their understanding of what is right after sufficiently assessing the new setting depends strongly on how insiders mediate a climate for alterations. Newcomers will only bring in their opinion, knowledge and suggestions for improvement if they feel that these are acknowledged and do not undermine their position in the company.

Experienced newcomers are aware of the fact that their expertise might not be welcomed with open arms by everyone the moment they enter the building. Therefore they engage in building deeper relationships to understand how insiders ‘*are wired*’ and individually tackle their reasons for resistance to alterations.

4.4. Summary

There is an informal power gradient between newcomers, being the ‘new kid’ without having a say and the established organisational members. This became most apparent in situations when seasoned newcomers attempted to bring in their own expertise from prior experiences and contribute with their own ideas.

Newcomers experienced how they depend on their co-workers to bring themselves in and engaged in deepening and widening their network of relationship to navigate between gatekeepers’ ‘stop’ and ‘go’. Newcomers need to get rid of their ‘newness’ first, before they can bring themselves in and have proofed themselves in the everyday interaction to be a valuable resource for the company and their colleagues.

5. CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine seasoned newcomer's experiences of socialisation during their onboarding. My study aims to fill the gap in the organisational socialisation literature by examining in a qualitative approach how newcomers experience the initial socialisation. This was done by conducting twelve interviews with participants of the onboarding process at that time and having a relaxed and open conversation with them in which they could share their impressions, emotions and stories. Newcomers' stories about their onboarding gave me a brief glimpse into how they make sense of this particular situation.

In the following chapter I will first give a brief overview of my findings, which I will discuss then in relation to the existing literature. Following from that I give implications for research and practice and end with limitations of my study and recommendations for future research.

5.1. Main Findings

My study showed how co-workers control the knowledge exchange with seasoned newcomers. Co-workers regulate the knowledge flow by sharing internal knowledge with newcomers and giving access to newcomers' external knowledge. Co-workers discipline newcomers for the violation of this control. Therefore, I argue in favour of a model of socialisation that does not take the organisational tactics or proactive behaviour of the newcomer into consideration, but builds upon a reflexive model of both affecting each other recursively.

In my study I found that newcomers respond to co-workers' control of knowledge exchange by holding back expertise. Providing suggestions for optimisation may be seen as an act of criticising which is usually not very welcome by the person receiving it. A relationship, in which the insider graciously provided information and experiences for the newcomer, may be overused by returning the favour in the form of critique. This may be an explanation why even newcomers who carry expertise from other settings restrain from giving feedback right away. Yet, after newcomers have built strong relationships with co-workers and become included into the work setting they seek to bring themselves in. Newcomers need to lose their

newness before they can attempt to shape their environment in interaction with relevant co-workers⁷.

5.2. Discussion

5.2.1. SEASONED NEWCOMERS AS CARRIERS OF EXPERTISE

My study shows that with hiring experienced newcomers the company gets fresh knowledge and experience, and critical new members who are very aware of what is not going the ‘right way’ - as they perceive it. Adkins (1995) suggests that the “adjustment to a job in a new setting must be viewed as a process of turning away from the patterns of behaviour and experiences established in the previous setting” (p. 839). Newcomers are forced to reevaluate their prior assumptions (Jones, 1986) and make sense of the new setting out of their experiences and dialogues between themselves and relevant others or groups (Harris, 1994), e.g. co-workers. Seasoned newcomers try to incorporate aspects of the ‘old’ into the ‘new’ context or even “resist the new role in favour of the old role.” (Louis, 1980: 237). As individuals seek to maintain self-efficacy and self-consistency (Beyer & Hannah, 2002) my data shows that seasoned newcomers feel reluctant to adopt new practices if these deviate from their past successes.

The focus in socialisation theory has either been on the organisational tactics (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992) or on how newcomers use pro-active tactics to adjust. Generally research focuses mostly on newcomers’ adjustment and neglects their wish to bring in their expertise and experiences. With the findings of my study I aim to partially fill this gap and show how seasoned newcomers attempt to bring themselves in but are stopped by co-workers’ control.

5.2.2. NEWCOMERS’ DEPENDENCE ON CO-WORKERS

In line with my data, literature states that newcomers seek to make sense of the new setting to move from organisational outsider to being a fully accepted insider through interacting with veteran co-workers who hold relevant knowledge (Johnson & Senges, 2010) for newcomers and through active participation in the community's professional activities (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006: 364). As Antonacopoulou and Güttel (2010) suggest are onboarding and socialisation predominantly oriented towards “fostering a sense of stability and continuity by encouraging the reproduction of organisational values and enforcing organisational

⁷ I define relevant co-workers as co-workers who are not necessarily in a spatial closeness, as in the same department, but are relevant concerning employees’ attempts to gain knowledge or provide suggestions for improvements.

priorities.” (p. 42). After the newcomer has settled in “dissatisfaction and criticism can develop. The practices the newcomer manifests can now deviate from the collective practice.” (Paré & Le Maistre, 2006: 367f.). My findings show that newcomers are motivated to learn about the company’s way, but also seek to contribute. In the literature pro-activity is mainly seen in the light of adjustment by seeking information, less as pro-actively distributing with prior knowledge (Grumen & Saks, 2011). I propose that when newcomers are confronted with co-workers’ control, they refrain from standing out and bringing their expertise in.

In these interactions co-workers control the knowledge exchange⁸ due to the power imbalance between them and the newcomer. Both formal and informal structures are always mediated through the relationships of organisational insiders, who possess the power to shape the socialisation process. I showed how insiders can block external knowledge to be embedded in the organisation. A practice perspective as taken by Antonacopoulou & Güttel (2010) acknowledges the positive role of conflict between established organisational members and newcomers, who have the potential to shake existing norms, as well as they learn how to reproduce these. However, my study points to the limitations newcomers’ face when bringing their prior experiences in due to the informal power gradient between them and established members of the organisation.

5.2.3. DEALING WITH CO-WORKERS’ CONTROL

Within the socialisation process newcomers learn boundaries of action and the rules of engagement (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010). As my findings show, do peers not only facilitate and enable socialisation but possess the power to restrain it. Regardless of formal rules is newcomers’ behaviour most significantly constrained by a strong informal influence of the work group in regulating deviance by social control (Hollinger & Clark, 1982). I suggest this control is of informal nature and enacted in the interaction of newbie and old hand.

Newcomers respond to co-workers’ control by holding back expertise. Referring to Harris’ (1994) account on individual sense-making I suggest that the interaction with co-workers produces a general understanding towards their co-workers’ attitudes. Newcomers make sense of any new ideas they have in relation to their perception of co-workers’ control. Therefore newcomers refrained from giving feedback and making suggestions on their own at a too

⁸ Knowledge transfer in organizations is the process through which individuals are affected by the experience of another (Argote, Ingram, Levine, & Moreland, 2000: 3).

early stage as this could have alienated their colleagues from them. Making suggestions for improvement is a critique towards the status quo and how co-workers were doing things.

In line with Antonacopoulou and Güttel (2010) can limited influence of prior experience be perceived as a result of adjustment pressure and the limited scope of a newcomer to influence the organisation. “Influence is the result of an implicit or explicit negotiation between newcomers and old timers.” (Choi & Levine, 2004). Onboarding therefore needs to focus not only on having newcomers learn the skills and the company specifics but on having newcomers build strong relationships in the field that make a mutual knowledge exchange likely as power relations are balanced. Within the process of gaining knowledge from co-workers, newcomers establish a social network and become integrated (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992). Participants go from peripheral to more central work tasks by building up a reputation from the work they do (Johnson & Senges, 2010). Studies on (informal) mentoring (Filstad, 2004; Allen & Shanock, 2013; Le Maistre, Boudreau, & Paré, 2006) paint a very positive picture of peer learning. They neglect that newcomers are dependent on mentors’ willingness to share and also the risk of them holding back information.

I suggest that inclusion in the sense of building strong relationships boosts confidence and thereby newcomers’ position to question the status quo. As suggested by Cooper-Thomas et al. (2012) newcomers engage in a number of tactics in interaction with insiders to deal with these uncertainties in the socialisation process like ‘befriending’, which means that newcomers try to establish social relations with a wider scope than their immediate team, and ‘teaming’, which points to them being seen as a team member and raise their influence on co-workers’ views. The clarification of interpersonal roles helps newcomers to cope with resistance (Gundry, 1993) and as my findings suggest this gives them a starting situation to get insiders on board for their initiatives for improvement.

Only then the newcomer can recognise him- or herself as a valuable addition to the community and contribute with ideas (Paré & Le Maistre, 200). My data showed as soon as newcomers have lost their status of being ‘new’ they become more pro-active and seek to bring in their expertise. Conforming to Mignerey et al. (1995) I suggest that newcomers with low levels of uncertainty, what their more stable position in the co-worker network could imply, seek more active involvement. To contribute pro-actively they had to negotiate their position with colleagues, so that the power imbalance between the presumably ‘newcomer’ and the organisational insider is resolved and modifying the setting becomes a cooperative project of ‘newcomers’ and insiders.

5.3. Theoretical Contributions

There is a rich and far-ranging landscape of literature concerning organisational socialisation. My study contributed to the question of how seasoned newcomers deal with the fit between know-how acquired in the past and their new jobs which affects their adjustment and eventual assimilation (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). With workers changing jobs more often and thereby gaining a variety of work related experiences, there is a demand for more studies investigating seasoned newcomers' experiences. Seasoned newcomers are no blank pages but they bring knowledge and experiences from their past into the new organisational setting. Whether they fully adjust to the new setting or are given the opportunity to bring in themselves is highly dependent on co-workers power to control the knowledge exchange. I suggest that a reflexive model of mutual exertion of influence gives a more coherent picture of the actual process of socialisation during the onboarding phase. Instead of only seeing relevant peers, or 'socialisation agents', as being part of the context (Wang et al., 2014), I suggest that the relationships which newcomers build with them define the quality of how well knowledge transfer in both directions works and organisational practices and climate are enacted.

Socialisation does not happen in a vacuum but there is a fluent passage to other processes in the organisation as recruitment and employee development. It is highly connected to issues of knowledge management, organisational learning and organisational identification, as well as change management. I hope my study will stimulate new conceptual and empirical research to advance our understanding of seasoned newcomers' experiences of socialisation. It can be questioned whether insiders' control of knowledge exchange rather blocks possible innovation or secures necessary stability in the organisation.

5.4. Practical Implications

As Bauer (2010) suggests should new employees be encouraged to provide input into decision-making processes and feel that they are contributing (Bauer, 2010). Also should the organisation provide more networking opportunities to help newcomers build strong (informal) relationships and thereby positive attitudes (Tang et al 2014). Management needs to see onboarding as an integrated process, rather than a check list. The embeddedness of newcomers in power relations needs to be taken into consideration and resolved by giving the newcomers the best conditions to lose their newness and become an integral part of the community. This can be promoted by providing occasions for getting to know each other on a personal level.

I suggest, in agreement with Harris et al. (2013) that more effort needs to be made to provide newcomers with a climate of development in which supervisors, but especially peers, make use of seasoned newcomers' knowledge and expertise and thus show support for creativity and innovation. Newcomers should not sense a risk to alienate their peers by making suggestions and thereby questioning their colleagues' way of doing things. By building relationships to relevant peers the collaborative nature of change is highlighted.

5.5. Limitations

Newcomers perceived the climate for bringing themselves in differently. This could be due to the interactions they engaged in with newcomers, but referring to Fang et al. (2011) also due to personality characteristics that play an important role to which extent an individual uses proactive behaviour to influence his or her access to social resources (Fang et al., 2011). In other words, newcomers with different characteristics tend to use diverse proactive socialisation tactics (Tang et al, 2014).

Organisational socialisation is based on mostly descriptive theories relevant only to specific socialisation settings (Louis, 1980). The study does not aim to generalise these issues for any organisation, but is of explorative nature and contemplates to give new insights of how the initial phase of organisational socialisation in a new setting is experienced by seasoned newcomers in particular.

5.6. Recommendations for Future Research

The interactive character of socialisation can be further examined if both parties are included in a study. Thereby the researcher can investigate the newcomers' perception in relation to co-workers explicated intentions concerning knowledge control. It would also be interesting to see how insiders perceive newcomers' entrance. Are newcomers looked upon as intruders, messiahs or neutrally? To examine co-workers' experience in working with a newcomer could give insights about their perspective on mutual learning during that process.

The potential for innovation by newcomers deserves more attention as only little is known about how established members of work groups respond to newcomers' attempts to change existing practices (Choi & Levine, 2004). It needs to be examined how organisations can find the right equilibrium for keeping the gates, both for knowledge sharing and taking in expertise, open without risking either reproducing the status quo unquestioned, or destabilising the organisation.

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