INDUCTION PRACTICES AND THE CONTINUOUS RECREATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL ROUTINES

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Organizational Memory, Staff Induction, Organizational Recreation

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Abstract
Staff induction and socialization serve as a means of continuously recreating the firm’s organizational memory (OM), so that organizations do not forget what they collectively know. However, OM research neglects this issue. In this paper, we address this research gap by integrating research of OM with organizational recreation and staff induction. In our theoretical analysis, we contribute to existing research by explaining the continuous recreation mode of OM, which is based on adjustment pressure, demonstrative learning, and knowledge provision. Furthermore, we describe the integration into organizational routines by emphasizing the inductee’s learning of the firm’s knowledge architecture (transactive memory) to integrate technical, social and cultural knowledge in a meaningful way. Finally, we analyze the role of a control-based and a commitment-based HRM strategy to govern staff induction, where the level of the newcomer’s background knowledge and the attempt to learn from inductees determine whether to use a control-based approach (transferring knowledge from the firm to the inductee) or a commitment-based approach (seize also novel ideas from newcomers).

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1 Introduction

Staff induction and socialization serve as a means of continuously recreating the firm’s organizational memory (OM), so that necessary that organizations do not forget what they collectively know. However, OM research neglects this issue. Induction practices represent a central mode to recreate an organization’s memory system. Newcomers learn the firm’s knowledge architecture - its transactive memory (Yuqing, Carley, & Argote, 2006) - to become fully-fledged members of the organization (Ardts, Jansen, & Van der Velde, 2001). We use OM literature as our theoretical lens. In current research, OM is predominantly conceptualized in relation to the organization’s ability to recall knowledge and experience ‘on demand’ whereby organizational rules, routines, cultures, structures, technologies and individual members are considered to be central knowledge repositories (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003; Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Huber, 1991; Moorman & Miner, 1998; Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Therefore, staff induction and socialization represent the main mode in which the firm’s OM is continuously recreated as new members have to deliberately and unconsciously learn the firm’s knowledge repositories in order to perform in a collective manner according to organizational requirements defined in routines, by technologies or cultural norms. However, hitherto only Birnholtz et al. (2007) with their study on the recreation of the organizational character of a summer camp, provides a first approach to capture the recreation of OM.

Recent literature lacks a thorough nexus between OM and its recreation by means of staff induction. Argote et al. (2003: 579) call for more research “on how knowledge is embedded in an organization’s memory”, which reflects the dynamic process of the OM’s recreation. In a review of the state of the field of staff induction, Antonacopoulou & Güttel (2010) emphasize that more research is necessary to investigate the contribution of staff induction to organizational recreation. In this paper we directly respond to these research gaps by analyzing staff induction practices and their role in the recreation of the firm’s OM. We therefore pose the following research question: How do staff induction practices influence the recreation of a firm’s OM?

We have theoretically identified three recreation mechanisms transforming newcomers into knowing employees: Adjustment pressure, demonstrative learning and knowledge provision. Firms embed these recreation mechanisms in different modes of endowing employees with knowledge to perform organizational routines. Individualized induction on the level of the working group enables an immediate integration into the working environment and forces inductees to learn practical knowledge in operative business. Work group pressure, the use of role models in the working environment and specific knowledge provision characterize recreation forces. Over time, newcomers also acquire firm knowledge, but mainly adapt a team-based perspective. Formal induction programs (institutionalized induction) seek to develop in a first step a broader perspective by providing information and by using role models (mentors and experts in formal onboarding programs). Subsequently, inductees are integrated into the working environment and specific knowledge provision characterize recreation forces. Over time, newcomers also acquire firm knowledge, but mainly adapt a team-based perspective. Formal induction programs (institutionalized induction) seek to develop in a first step a broader perspective by providing information and by using role models (mentors and experts in formal onboarding programs). Subsequently, inductees are integrated into the working environment and group pressure enfolds impact on behavior adaptation. Laissez faire induction modes neither offer sufficient information, role models, or pressure to adapt, resulting in a high likelihood of not integrating newcomers into the firm’s memory structure. Induction programs, both institutionalized and individualized, support a stable recreation of the firm’s OM. Existing patterns in operative business and group structures make the integration of new knowledge from inductees into the existing OM difficult. Only a structured attempt to develop behavioral patterns within a strong group of new inductees enfolds impact as these collective new values and norms challenge existing cultural values and norms in the operative business when inductees enter their designated working environment.
We contribute to existing research on staff induction and the OM’s recreation in three ways: First, we extend research on organizational recreation, initially provided by Birnholtz et al. (2007) with their analysis of the recreation of the organizational character of a summer camp. In extension to Birnholtz et al.’s (2007) notion on demonstrative learning and knowledge provision, we identified adjustment pressure as the main mode for integrating newcomers into the firm. Inductees do not only follow the suggestions and instructions of experienced colleagues and team leaders voluntarily, which must be the case in the non-profit setting of the summer camp investigated by Birnholtz et al. (2007). Instead, firms often seek to guide the integration of newcomers tightly, in particular in cases where inductees lack sufficient background knowledge for task performance. Second, we show how newcomers develop a transactive memory (Yuqing et al., 2006). Our literature analysis indicates three memory domains – technical knowledge, social network knowledge and cultural knowledge as both declarative and procedural knowledge (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994) – underpinning task performance and, therefore, necessary to be learned by newcomers. We identified induction activities as the mode which allows an inductee to learn the idiosyncratic knowledge architecture of the firm to enable orientation on firm and on team level. Institutionalized induction programs support the development of a firm-wide orientation to new employees as key features of the formal knowledge base are presented. More importantly, the learning process on a team level facilitates the establishment of a mental map of how these three memory domains interact and how they contribute to organizational functioning. By learning the firm’s knowledge architecture, inductees internalize existing formal and social expectations from different groups within the firm that mark the boundaries for deviations from the status quo. Third, we describe the role of either a control-based or a commitment-based human resource management (HRM) system to enable an integration of newcomers in order to meet the culturally idiosyncratic characteristics of the firm. In the next section, we analyze the state of the field on OM, staff induction and socialization, and the role of HRM strategies in governing induction processes. Subsequently, we explain our contribution to existing research on a continuous recreation of OM, staff induction, and the corresponding role of HRM strategies.

2 Organizational Memory, Induction Practices, and Organizational Recreation

During the early years of OM research, the firm’s memory was perceived as a static construct. In line with the distinction between knowledge and knowing (Orlikowski, 2002), practice and practising (Antonacopoulou, 2004), or routines and performance (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Pentland & Feldman, 2005), the process of remembering receives increasing attention (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994). In their review of staff induction and socialization literature, Antonacopoulou & Güttel (2010) emphasize that more research from an organizational and HRM perspective is necessary to understand the processes of induction and recreation. In the subsequent section, we analyze the state of the field of OM and – in particular – the way in which newcomers deliberately and unconsciously learn to remember; i.e. to draw on the firm’s knowledge base. We, therefore, present the current approach to OM and the process of remembering. Subsequently, we analyze the literature on staff induction and socialization as the main mode in which firms make newcomers familiar with the firm’s OM. Finally, we explain the institutional foundation to guide this introduction process by drawing on HRM literature.

2.1 Organizational Memory and Recreation Mechanisms
Owing to the emergence of the OM concept in information processing theories (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), the idea of OM is its function of storing information, knowledge, and experience on an organizational level. However, over the course of time a broader knowledge management cycle has been integrated into the OM debate. In this tradition, Walsh & Ungson (1991) and Huber (1991) theoretically and Hargadon & Sutton (1997) empirically described OM as a means to acquire, retain, and retrieve knowledge and information. Walsh & Ungson (1991) conceive OM as an information processing system, which is similar to the memory of individuals, an interpretative system, and a network of inter-subjectively shared meanings. Thus, they locate OM both on the individual and on the organizational level. Individual employees, the organization’s culture, its standard operating procedures and practices, roles and organizational structures and the physical structure of the workplace are, thereby, conceptualized as five “retention bins” for OM. Another prominent typology of different repositories of organizational knowledge that underlies an organization’s memory is provided by Argote (2005: 67-97): She distinguishes between knowledge embedded in individuals, organizations (structural arrangements), technologies, structures and routines. These distinctions of organizational knowledge repositories are closely connected to the differentiation between “procedural” and “declarative” memory (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994; Kyriakopoulos & de Ruyter, 2004; Moorman & Miner, 1998). The organizations’, respectively their members’, declarative memory comprises knowledge on facts, events or propositions – know that, know why, know when (Huber, 1991; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Moorman & Miner, 1998). It is perceived as an object, which can be consciously and intentionally recollected. Thus, OM can be understood in terms of stored explicit knowledge by using ICT-tools and other repositories of explicit knowledge. In this tradition, ICT-tools and explicit knowledge are conceived as the organization’s memory systems (Chou, 2005; Nilakanta, Miller, & Dan, 2006; Olivera, 2000).

In contrast, procedural memory is defined as skill knowledge in terms of organizational routines. Procedural memory develops in connection with organizational routines (Andersen, 2003; Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994; Hodgson & Knudsen, 2004; Kyriakopoulos & de Ruyter, 2004; Moorman & Miner, 1998), is manifested in “patterned sequences of learned behavior involving multiple actors” (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994: 557) and can store knowledge that is not readily codified (Hodgson & Knudsen, 2004). The basic collective action dispositions of an organization – its routines respectively practices and customs – are retained through the procedural memory of the performing organizational actors on all levels of the hierarchy. In a more recent paper, Birnholtz et al. (2007) demonstrate the impact of procedural memory on the “regeneration” of organizations: Even long term breaks and personnel turnover are compensated due to organizational routines and the embedded procedural knowledge. Consequently, procedural memory equates to practices of organizational remembering. ‘Acting on their retained dispositions’ experienced employees ‘shape the experience of newcomers, thereby instilling – although not identical – dispositions and, hence, regenerating the organization’ (Birnholtz et al., 2007: 318). Accordingly, newcomers become acquainted with ‘the abstract, generalized idea’ (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 101) of the organizational routines – their ostensive aspects. Ostensive aspects can be codified as retained knowledge in formal rules that represent organizational artefacts and the physical manifestation of organizational routines (Pentland & Feldman, 2005). Thus, formal rules can be perceived as part of the declarative memory of an organization that govern individual behavior, but also facilitate change and learning (Kieser, Beck, & Taimio, 2003; March, Schulz, & Zhou, 2000). Formal rules have to be interpreted by employees who refer to the ostensive aspects of organizational routines as “taken for granted” norms (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 101). Ostensive aspects, therefore, can be conceived as social rules – that govern behavior (i.e. the performance of organizational routines) – along shared expectations and connected sanction mechanisms to prevent deviations. Moreover, ostensive aspects also influence how formal
rules are interpreted and which stored knowledge is designated to be used. As a basic element of organizational routines, social rules can be conceived as the procedural memory of an organization. New employees learn these shared assumptions “automatically” as action occurs’ (Birnholtz et al., 2007: 318). Thus, in their performance of organizational practices, these actors do not have to be consciously aware of assumptions regarding their co-workers or organizational settings. They implicitly store and activate them. All organizational members mutually adapt their activities and decision-making behavior according to the ensemble of ostensive aspects that enable collective action patterns. Therefore, organizational routines are recurrent interaction patterns that constitute a set of formal guidelines, social rules and a collective understanding of how the formal guidelines have to be applied by employees (ostensive aspects). The individual accomplishment of formal and social guidelines through employees in their individual practices (performative aspects) enables and constitutes in sum an organizational routine.

Accordingly, Birnholtz et al. (2007) identify four organizational recreation mechanisms that foster the reproduction of ‘a coherent ecology of action patterns that are recognized as “the same” as previous instances of the organization’ (ibid.: 316): (1) the demonstration of existing practices, (2) the cascading of guidance, (3) different forms of communication (centralized and unspecific, modular and face-to-face) and (4) applying generic skills in a specific context. First, the ‘primacy of demonstration’ reflects the transfer of knowledge about formal and social rules, skills and experience from experienced employees to newcomers by repetitive and representative demonstrations of required tasks: ‘Demonstrating this core behavior early in staff training allowed this coherence to persist’ (Birnholtz et al., 2007: 323). The process is ‘multistaged’ and is based on the memories of experienced staff members that demonstrate established and effective action dispositions and guide the future activities of the newcomers. Second, a ‘guidance cascade’ facilitates the distribution of procedural knowledge to new employees. In this process, the relevant information is not transferred hierarchically through an authority, but rather through a co-worker ‘relying on memory to provide guidance that seemed reasonable’ (ibid.: 325): ‘The important distinction here is that the sort of transfer that occurs via a cascade is neither a detailed set of instructions about how exactly one is to perform one’s job nor a reliable commitment on what will later be acceptable. Rather, it is a higher-level description of how things once looked, how they were done in the past, or how they might be done now’ (ibid.). Third, a ‘bursty communication’ in form of a brief face-to-face communication delivers newcomers with enough information to give their activities an orientation in terms of a basic framework of ‘sameness’ that allows for situational interpretation and variations. On the one hand, rapid ‘collective bursts’ exhibit a broad applicability and ensure that all newcomers are provided with identical information and shared beliefs. On the other hand, individual bursts complement the collective form in giving detailed feedback and correcting individuals or small groups. Fourth, new employees have to apply their generic skills in the specific organizational context. Professional knowledge and experience have to be adapted to the situational conditions. In this connection, newcomers ask experienced colleagues for advice or combine their professional knowledge with their experience of the new organization to improvise performances. This application of generic skills in the context of the organization allows for potential changes of existing practices.

The question whether the improvisations of new actors are maintained or if they are corrected, depends on three interdependent aspects: (1) the domain credibility of the improviser, (2) the visibility of improvised action and (3) the degree of risk or of external standardization in the area. First, if a newcomer has strong domain knowledge and experience that other actors respect, his innovative performances – resolving from specific ambiguities – are likely to be retained. Furthermore, the adoption of innovative action depends on the insistence of the
improviser and the organization’s openness to change. Second, if established actions cannot be observed and the corresponding improvisations are not in conflict with the action dispositions of other organizational members, the probability of the innovative practices to be maintained rises. Third, innovative behavior is restricted in risky activity areas or domains where external standards are institutionalized (Birnholtz et al., 2007).

In the following, we seek to advance the work of Birnholtz et al. (2007) on regeneration modes, which they developed to explain the recreation of annual summer camps. We, thereby, focus on the continuous recreation mechanisms of introducing newcomers to the organization. To illustrate the practice of organizational recreation and the process of how organizational knowledge is adopted and maintained through new employees, we analyze the role of staff induction and organizational socialization processes (Ardts et al., 2001), through which new employees deliberately and unconsciously learn the firm’s OM.

2.2 Organizational Recreation and Induction Practices

An organization is able to convey knowledge about its formal and social rules to new employees and to reproduce its ‘character’ over time understood as ‘coherent content of the ensemble of dispositions that generates the distinctive actions of the organization’ (Birnholtz et al., 2007: 317) on the basis of staff induction programs that have to be consistent with the overall HR strategy. New employees learn the organizational routine’s underlying rules during the socialization process (March, 1991; Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991: 35-37). Organizational socialization can be defined as ‘the learning process by which newcomers develop attitudes and behavior that are necessary to function as a fully-fledged member of the organization’ (Ardts et al., 2001: 159). It reflects a learning process ‘through which a new organizational employee adapts from outsider to integrated and effective insider’ (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006: 492) and develops knowledge about the organizational structure, its formal rules and official goals (artifacts) as well as its social rules (ostensive aspects) that are shaped by the firm’s history, traditions and politics of the organization. Furthermore, the newcomer is introduced to his work unit and is taught how the working tasks and functions have to be fulfilled (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2006). The central aim of organizational socialization is the transfer of job and task relevant information to the new organizational member.

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) characterize six tactics that define a specific organizational socialization setting and through which organizations seek to transfer information to newcomers:

(1) Collective – individual (whether newcomers are socialized in groups or individually).
(2) Formal vs informal (whether or not newcomers are segregated from insiders during socialization).
(3) Sequential vs random (whether or not newcomers are told explicitly about the sequencing of planned socialization events).
(4) Fixed vs variable (whether or not there is an explicit, fixed timetable for completing the various socialization stages).
(5) Serial vs disjunctive (whether or not previous job incumbents are available as role models for newcomers).
(6) Investiture vs divestiture (whether or not newcomers receive positive social support from insiders).

These socialization tactics described by van Maanen & Schein (1979) can be seen as a continuum with two poles: the first pole – the institutionalized socialization – is based on a
group process and is strongly orchestrated by the organization. In contrast, the second pole reflects an individualized socialization process that is less governed by the organization (Jones, 1986; Ardts et al., 2001). Whereas institutionalized socialization tactics lead to the adaption of custodial and individualized socialization tactics to more innovative newcomer role orientations (Major, 2000): ‘It appears that institutionalized tactics are likely to be ineffective in encouraging personal growth and development and may even be dysfunctional when newcomer flexibility and adaptability are important goals’ (ibid.: 364).

Accordingly, Ardts et al. (2001) establish a link between the abstract socialization tactics of an organization and its concrete personnel instruments like an induction program, training and education, career planning and counseling as well as performance appraisals. As the socialization tactics reflect ‘general characteristics of concrete socialization-interventions’ (ibid.: 161) induction practices can be described in terms of socialization tactics that may consist of a specific combination of the six poles, for example, an induction program that tactics are individual, informal, random, variable, serial and divesture, whereas, induction is defined as arrangements that are ‘made to familiarize the new employee with the organization, safety rules, general conditions of employment, and the work of the section or department in which they are employed’ (Skeats, 1991: 16).

2.3 Induction and HR Systems

The organization’s concrete induction practices that are derived from abstract socialization tactics have to be consistent with the overall HR strategy (Baron & Kreps, 1999). In general, two consistent HRM systems can be identified in the current HRM literature: (1) a bureaucratic or control strategy and (2) a commitment strategy (Lengnick-Hall et al.):

(1) A control-based HRM system reflects specific employment practices corresponding with a specific set of formal (administrative) rules and procedures (Osterman, 1984) that are based on hierarchical control. Its formal rule system is centrally planned and bureaucratically structured. The strategic practices are, therefore, input-oriented and planned. In terms of its general logic, a control strategy can be connected to an institutionalized socialization process and a bureaucratic induction approach where formal, standardized and restricting induction practices enable the recreation of the HRM system and its underlying organizational memory. Hired cohorts have a ‘common initiatory and learning experience’ (Allen & Meyer, 1990: 847). Their induction phase is guided by formal rules and standardized (sequential and fixed) induction practices with corresponding and ‘explicit guidelines about the sequence and timing of progression in an organization’ (ibid.). ‘Role models for newcomers are present, constituting a serial socialization tactic’ (ibid.: 847-848): ‘Serial tactics may promote a custodial role orientation in a similar way: newcomers exposed to someone who has done, or is doing, their new job have clearer guidelines for the job and less need to learn on their own than newcomers who have no such exposure’ (ibid.: 848). Furthermore, the ‘social support from organization members confirms the newcomer’s identity, constituting investiture’ (ibid.: 847-848). Finally, the ‘[s]equential and fixed tactics, whereby newcomers receive information about the sequence and timing of their progress in the organization, make newcomers less likely, as Jones noted, to "rock the boat" (1986: 265)’ (Allen & Meyer, 1990: 848). So the new employees learn a conformist role behavior that restricts them in applying new knowledge and interpreting existing rules and norms. Overall, the focus in this approach lies on knowledge deepening and the recreation of the declarative aspects of the organizations memory, where, artifacts play an important role.

(2) In contrast to the control HRM system, the commitment strategy represents a bundle of HR practices that ‘aim at getting more from workers by giving more to them’ (Baron & Kreps, 1999: 189). They facilitate the employee’s commitment by using long-term employment guarantees, team-based production systems, job rotation or quality cycles (ibid.;
Osterman & Burton, 2005) and are characterized by a high degree of self-organization and a looser, less strictly formalized and decentrally regulated rule system. Their strategic processes are output-oriented, governed and controlled regarding the central goals of the organization; actors have an individual sphere of influence. Furthermore, the self-organization and social learning processes of a commitment strategy encourage the flexibility and creativity of actors and, therefore, enhance the innovation potentials of new employees. Due to the basal logic of the commitment strategy, the general socialization process is more individualized and less governed by the organization than in the institutionalized process of the control strategy.

The corresponding induction approach can be described as a ‘clan approach’ that is guided by social rules and is flexible not standardized. There is a ‘unique initiatory and learning experience (it is individual) and on-the-job training (it is informal). Providing little information about the sequence or timing of career progression, the organization uses random and variable socialization tactics. Requiring newcomers to develop their own roles, it employs a disjunctive tactic. Finally, treatment by organization members that disconfirms newcomers’ identities constitutes divestiture’ (Allen & Meyer, 1990: 848). Furthermore, ‘divestiture encourages innovative role orientations because, unlike investiture, it causes newcomers to question assumptions about their behavior and challenges them to justify or modify it’ (ibid. referring to Jones, 1986). On the one hand, the induction practices provide newcomers with the required background knowledge (i.e. their understanding of the firm’s strategy, their absorptive capacity and their ability to perform exploratory learning) to correctly interpret the ostensive aspects of organizational routines and corresponding social norms and sanction mechanisms and, on the other hand, enable them to develop new interpretations of the ostensive aspect and enfold their innovation potential. The central aim is the broadening of the existing knowledge base. In terms of organizational memory the focus lies on the recreation and perpetuation of the procedural memory.

3 Discussion and Conclusion

Research on OM lacks a dynamic perspective that shows how OM is continuously recreated and enacted over the course of time. In this paper, we took up this research gap (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010) and integrated OM with knowledge on staff induction and organizational recreation. We perceive staff induction as the main mode for newcomers to learn parts of the firm’s knowledge base with the aim of acting fully in accordance with the standards of the firm. We contribute to the existing research in three ways:

First, we extend research on organizational recreation, initially provided by Birnholtz et al. (2007) with their analysis of the recreation of the organizational character of a summer camp. In line with their findings, literature of staff induction and socialization also indicate that the primacy of demonstration and the provision of information are substantial parts of the socialization process. However, based on our analysis of control-based and commitment-based HRM systems, we need to add adjustment pressure according to existing expectation structures as another substantial mode of organizational recreation.

Firms use different modes to endow employees with knowledge to perform organizational routines as also Birnholtz et al. (2007) mention different information providing mechanisms (e.g. collective burst, bursty communication). According to the distinction between institutionalized and individualized staff induction, we distinguish between a one-step and a two-step approach of induction where employees receive information necessary to perform in accordance with the standards of the firm. In a two-step approach, following the logic of standardized induction programs on firm level, newcomers receive more theoretical and ‘good practice’-knowledge and information that has to be applied and adopted to the specific working context after inductees are integrated into the operative business. The immediate integration into the working team follows the logic of a one-step approach of induction.
Newcomers are quickly integrated into their working environment and acquire practical knowledge of the operative business. Over the course of time, they also develop knowledge about the firm, but mainly from a team-based perspective.

Demonstrative learning also occurs differently in a standardized induction program (two-step approach) and during the integration into the working team (one-step approach). The integration into the working environment offers insights into the behavior of working group members that act as role models. Sometimes, official or informal mentors for inductees are used to support the translation of values and norms of the organizational culture, explain the social network structure within the firm and indicate which knowledge has to be applied in different situations. In standardized induction programs (two-step approach), managers and experts are usually invited to participate in training and workshop sessions. Thus, newcomers have the opportunity to follow their explanations about their individual activities within the firm in a broader sense and about the firm in general. Therefore, the firm offers role models for newcomers in induction programs that enable demonstrative learning by analyzing their behavior.

In extension of Birnholtz et al. (2007), we identified adjustment pressure as the main mode of integrating newcomers into the firm and, therefore, recreating the firm’s OM. Either in a control-based or in a commitment-based HRM strategy, collective expectations exist so that newcomers learn to stick to existing formal (control) or social (commitment) rules. Inductees do not only follow the suggestions and instructions of experienced colleagues and team leaders voluntarily, a must in the case of the non-profit setting of the summer camp investigated by Birnholtz et al. (2007). Instead, firms seek to guide the integration of newcomers often tightly, in particular in cases where inductees lack sufficient background knowledge for task performance. The immediate integration into the working environment increases the pressure for newcomers to adjust their behavior to existing standards as quickly as possible in order to perform operative routines collectively with their colleagues. Inductees are forced to learn the collective understanding underlying the operative routines, called ostensive aspects (Pentland & Feldman 2003, Feldman & Pentland 2005), to contribute to task fulfillment of the working team. However, adjustment pressure concerns the determination of the boundaries of behavior to meet the expectations from team members embedded into ostensive aspects. The more advanced the background knowledge, e.g. by hiring experts in a certain field, the wider the boundaries of the corridor for accepted behavior. Inexperienced newcomers have to stick tightly to pre-defined rules, i.e. the boundaries of the corridor for accepted behavior is narrow. The adjustment pressure is more substantial and more important on a team level than on a firm level during standardized induction programs. Theoretical explanations of firm-wide expectations cannot be that precise for a concrete working context as they have to be more of a general validity.

Second, we also contribute to research on procedural memory (Cohen & Bacdayan, 1994) and the continuous updating of organizational routines (Pentland & Feldman 2003). These two research streams have emphasized the dynamic nature of organizational knowledge that allows employees to connect different knowledge repositories for task performance. Analyzing literature indicates that three memory domains – technical knowledge, social network knowledge and cultural knowledge – underpin task performance and, therefore, are necessary to be learned by newcomers. Standardized induction programs support the development of a firm-wide orientation for new employees as key features of the formal knowledge base are presented. More importantly, the learning process on a team level facilitates the establishment of a mental map of how these three memory domains interact and how they contribute to organizational functioning. In this regard, ostensive aspects can be perceived as the task-specific and team-based knowledge architecture that has to be learned by inductees to contribute positively to task performance.
Third, HRM literature distinguishes between a control-based and a commitment-based HR strategy (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). A control-based HR strategy is based on formal rules and hierarchical control to ensure the employees’ performance. In contrast, a commitment-based HR strategy seeks to increase the commitment of employees to the firm in general. We have theoretically derived two different induction practices from these two HRM strategies, which we have labeled ‘bureaucratic approach’ and ‘clan approach’. The bureaucratic mode of staff induction is applied in a standardized two-step approach, where the firm presents information, tools, and techniques to inductees formally. The bureaucratic induction strategy, which is often labeled as ‘good practice’ to introduce newcomers into a firm, is applied in larger firms and for inductees with a low level of background knowledge. In formal programs, the newcomers learn the foundation of the firm’s business model. In contrast, the clan approach is more frequent in smaller firms (that lack bigger HR departments with the responsibilities for designing staff induction programs) and for newcomers with a high level of background knowledge. The firms seek to profit from the expertise of experienced inductees and, therefore, do not include the newcomer into pre-defined induction programs. Instead, the inductees are integrated into working teams that often seek to profit from new knowledge provided by the newcomer. Therefore, we can conclude that the more a firm intends to profit from the expertise of newcomers (i.e. high level of background knowledge), the more appropriate a commitment-based induction approach is. On the contrary, the lower the level of background knowledge of inductees is, the higher the necessity for a firm to provide sufficient knowledge to new employees in order to integrate him or her into the existing organization is and, thus, to ensure the recreation of the firm’s OM through their activities.

References


