When Do Supervisor Expectations for Creativity Lead to Newcomer Innovative Role Orientation? A Role Theory Perspective on Contingent Conditions

Abstract

Using a role theory perspective, this study investigated contingent conditions under which supervisor expectations for creativity is related to newcomer innovative role orientation. Longitudinal data were collected from 161 graduates from a university in the UK’s southwest. The results show that the relationship between supervisor expectations for creativity and innovative role orientation is stronger when there is a high level of perceived peer support for creativity and innovation. Moreover, newcomers’ supervisor relationship building efforts provide substitute for a low level of peer support for creativity and innovation in enhancing the relationship of supervisor expectations for creativity with innovative role orientation. Implications of these findings for theory and practice are discussed.

*Key words:* organizational socialization, newcomer role orientation, supervisor expectations for creativity, peer support for creativity and innovation, supervisor relationship building
New employees have to adapt on a whole range of levels to their new context. One decision these newcomers have to make is their orientation to their role. A custodial role orientation is often the most expedient response, conforming to organizational rules and norms for the role, and thus replicating how the role has been performed in the past (Jones, 1986; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). At the other end of the continuum, newcomers may choose to redefine the role, either most majorly in terms of the aims of the role, or less radically in terms of how the role is conducted; these reflect an innovative role orientation (Jones, 1986; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Given that newcomers are often expected to change personally to assimilate into new organizational roles (Fisher, 1986), to date a majority of research efforts has investigated how organizations can bring newcomers in line with organizational norms and rules, yielding newcomers with a custodial role orientation (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007).

The opposite of this, that is newcomers taking a more innovative orientation, may benefit organizations, helping them develop and survive in the longer term (Ashforth, Sluss & Saks, 2007; van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Newcomers have potential value through the distinct skills and unique experiences they bring; if they have not yet been socialized to align with the organization, they may be important resources for generating creative ideas and acting innovatively (Ashforth et al., 2007). In fact, there has been growing research interest around newcomers’ behaviours that challenge the status quo (Harris, Li, Boswell, Zhang, & Xie, 2014; Kammeyer-Mueller, Livingston, & Liao, 2011). Yet, still little is known on what factors may foster newcomers’ innovative role orientation. This is particularly interesting because if newcomers are not enabled to be innovative, their valuable skills and abilities may be wasted (Wang, Kammeyer-Mueller, Liu, & Li, 2015).

To address this question, we adopt role theory as a relevant perspective in this study. According to role theory, any role in a social unit comprises a set of expectations about the things that the person in that role should either do or not do (Turner, 1962). Each role expectation acts as a motivational force for the role occupant, with this force potentially differing both in magnitude and direction (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In the context of organizational socialization, Major and her colleagues (1995) argued that “role theory suggests that supervisors’ and coworkers’ interactions with newcomers centre around role negotiation and development (Graen, Orris, & Johnson, 1973; D. Katz & Kahn, 1978), particularly during early socialization (R. Katz, 1980)” (p. 419). Since newcomers’ supervisors and peer colleagues are key players in their role set, we focus on two motivational forces stemming from these, namely supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation.

In keeping with prior studies on the Pygmalion effect (Eden, 1984, Natanovich & Eden, 2008; Tierney & Farmer, 2004), supervisor expectations for creativity in this study represents to what extent newcomers are expected to bring creative ideas and performance. The concept of perceived peer support for creativity and innovation is construed in broad terms pertaining to peer support for both the generation of creative ideas and the implementation of those new ideas. We suspect that peer support for creativity and innovation can manifest as a dimension of social climate to deliver ‘expectancies’ and signal potential outcomes of such behaviour (Scott & Bruce, 1994).

In considering whether to adopt an innovative role orientation, newcomers are likely to evaluate whether supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation are consistent. For example, if supervisors or peers show a low level of expectations and support towards newcomers’ creative ideas and innovative initiatives, newcomers may
hesitate to go against this and therefore they will instead choose to implement a custodial role orientation. In contrast, if newcomers experience a high level of supervisor expectations for creativity, and also perceive a high level of support from peers for acting creatively and innovatively, then newcomers are more likely to demonstrate an innovative role orientation. In short, we propose an interactive effect of supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation on newcomer innovative role orientation, such that the relationship of supervisor expectations for creativity will be more strongly related with newcomer innovative role orientation when newcomers perceive a high level of peer support for creativity and innovation.

Role theory also suggests that interpersonal factors may influence the relationship between role expectations and role behaviours (Katz & Khan, 1978). Guided by this tenet, we propose that the newcomer proactive behaviour of supervisor relationship building may serve as a substitute for the lack of peer support for creativity and innovation and, in turn, influence the effect of supervisor expectations for creativity on innovative role orientation. Specifically, for newcomers who make the effort to build a good relationship with their supervisors, this will help enable them to have a clearer view on their supervisors’ expectations for creativity, which newcomers are then more likely to follow and demonstrate an innovative role orientation, even when they perceive low peer support for creativity and innovation. In contrast, newcomers who make minimal effort to build up a good relationship with their supervisors are less likely to be aware of or take heed of supervisor expectations for creativity.

Overall, this research contributes to the literature in three ways. First of all, research on organizational socialization has tended to focus solely on the interaction between newcomers and roles, often viewed via unmet expectations and psychological contract, with the key focus on how to reconcile differences between newcomers and roles (e.g., Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995; Sutton & Griffin, 2004; Wesson & Gogus, 2005). Our study goes beyond the newcomer-role interaction by investigating how the newcomer’s role set (i.e., supervisors and peers) communicate role expectations can influence newcomer role orientation (i.e., custodial vs. innovative). In doing so, we aim to answer Major et al. ’s (1995) research call on investigating the nature of interactions between newcomers and their social context by considering a broader context and including other contextual characteristics.

Second, in addition to contributing to the socialization literature, this study also has implications for the study of the Pygmalion effect. As indicated by Karakowsky, DeGama and McBey (2012), prior research often simplifies the Pygmalion effect by assuming that managerial expectations can translate into employee performance, and therefore suggest future research to examine “the dynamics that make an employee more or less susceptible to the Pygmalion leader’s expectations and supportive behaviour” (p. 592). Our results address this concern and shed some lights on how to foster the expected-behaviour from the perspective of role theory. Specifically, we emphasize the importance of consistent role expectations from multiple role-senders (i.e. supervisor and peers) in explaining why newcomers undertake an innovative role orientation after organizational entry, a critical question that seen little research.

Finally, although both newcomers and organizational insiders (e.g., supervisors and peers) are predicted to influence the socialization process, these different socialization agents have typically been researched in isolation (Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2009; Sluss & Thompson, 2012). In this situation, drawing on role theory, we investigate how the supervisor, peers, and the newcomer might interactively affect newcomer role orientation. More specifically, we explore boundary conditions, provided by peers and the newcomer, under which supervisor expectations
for creativity is related to newcomer role orientation. Exploring these moderators may have the practical benefit of indicating possible interventions to encourage newcomer innovative role orientation.

**Supervisor expectations for creativity and newcomer role orientation**

From the perspective of role theory, Katz and Kahn (1978) highlighted the importance of role expectations on shaping role perceptions and role behaviours. Role expectations are beliefs about what is required to perform a role appropriately (Biddle, 1986), representing the patterned activities perceived necessary to perform specific jobs (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991). Katz and Kahn (1978) suggested that the process of role-sending is ‘directed at the focal person and intended to bring about conformity to the expectations of the senders’ (p. 190), which is conceptually in line with the Pygmalion process that emphasizes superior’s expectations as a key source of a follower’s self-expectations (Tierney & Farmer, 2004; Karakowsky et al., 2012).

In the context of organizational socialization, supervisors are considered to be one of the most common resources for newcomers to gain information (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992); they often serve as the primary role sender for the newcomer to clarify job requirements and guide newcomers to behave properly (Morrison, 1993; Nifadkar, Tsui, & Ashforth, 2012). Therefore, supervisor expectations should be construed as providing critical standards for role performance, and as a major source for newcomers to internalize role perceptions.

The supervisor may hold various expectations towards newcomers after their organizational entry such as understanding work procedures, and performing tasks efficiently. One supervisory expectation is the newcomer’s orientation to their role, which may range from taking a custodial approach and replicating previous the role as performed previously, or it may be to bring new ideas and challenge the status quo. Supervisor expectations for creativity provide an essential cue if newcomers are expected to innovate in their role. Specifically, supervisor expectations for creativity is found to increase subordinates’ intrinsic motivation (Atwater & Carmeli, 2009), creative performance (Tierney & Farmer, 2004), and involvement in innovative behaviour (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007; Scott & Bruce, 1994). For example, in two separate studies with US project teams in the telecommunications industry, Huang, Krasikova and Liu (2016) found that followers are motivated to engage in creative behaviors when they are aware that creativity is expected from their leader.

Extending those findings in the context of organizational socialization, it is reasonable to propose that newcomers who perceive that their supervisors expect them to be creative are more likely to feel they should take an innovative role orientation at work. However, does it mean newcomers respond equally to the expectations of their supervisors? We suspect not. Given a newcomer is also an active role-sender for oneself (Katz & Kahn, 1978), the role orientation of the newcomer may be shaped by the influence of both supervisor expectations of creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation. These situations are discussed in the following sections.

**Perceived peer support for creativity and innovation as a moderator**

As discussed earlier, a key premise of role theory is that contextual factors shape role perceptions and behaviours (Biddle, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Essentially, the social context provides cues influencing ongoing role behaviors (Dierdorff, Rubin, & Bachrach, 2012). In the context of organizational socialization, social influence is particularly apparent after organizational entry as newcomers tend to rely heavily on both supervisors and other colleagues for role learning and for instrumental and expressive peer support for creativity and innovation (Ashforth, 2001; Harris et al., 2014). However, it does not mean that role expectations from
different role senders are always the same. Newcomers may find that ‘incompatible role demands will be placed on him or her within the organizational context’ (Major et al., 1995, p. 420), which need to be reconciled. For example, when peer support for creativity and innovation is perceived to be low, although newcomers who experience high supervisor expectations for creativity may hold a firm belief that their supervisor trusts their capabilities for creative work, inadequate peer support for creativity and innovation may stimulate newcomers to reappraise their role perceptions and question the appropriateness of innovative role orientation. After all, creativity involves uncertainty (Zhang & Zhou, 2014), and innovation can be a risky endeavour (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Being creative and innovative involves considerable investment of resources (Anderson, Potonik, & Zhou, 2014; Amabile, 1997), but such efforts are not guaranteed to be valued or recognized by other colleagues (Janssen, 2003). Employees who come up with ideas for innovative change may challenge and even violate established habits and ways of doing things (Ford, 1996), and therefore team members are likely to resist, because they may be committed to the existing frameworks of thoughts and actions (Doughearty & Heller, 1994).

In contrast, a positive and compatible context, where the newcomer perceives both a high level of supervisor expectations for creativity and a high level of peer support for creativity and innovation, may be viewed as confirming that newcomer creative ideas and innovative attempts are expected and acceptable. In such circumstances, newcomers are likely to reduce uncertainty and increase beliefs that their innovative initiatives would receive favourable social evaluations, and therefore increase confidence of performing innovative role orientation. In contrast, a high level of supervisor expectations for creativity alongside a low level of peer support may be interpreted as signalling that such behaviours are not really expected or welcomed.

**Hypothesis 1**: Peer support for creativity and innovation moderates the relationship between supervisor expectations of creativity and newcomer innovative role orientation, such that this relationship is stronger when there is a high level of peer support for creativity and innovation.

**Interplay between peer support for creativity and innovation and supervisor relationship building as moderators**

In addition to the contextual cues aroused by the supervisor and peers, Katz and Kahn (1978, p. 216) indicated that interpersonal relations factors, such as frequency of communication, may have a moderating function between focal person and role senders. Building on their argument, one role-relevant proactive behaviour captures the communication mode between newcomers and their supervisors, namely supervisor relationship building.

Within the organizational socialization literature, newcomer proactive behaviours have been found to be important predictors of positive newcomer adjustment (Ashford & Black, 1996; Saks, Gruman, & Cooper-Thomas, 2011). Newcomers have a range of proactive behaviours to choose from; of these, one is focused on the supervisor, specifically building a good relationship with one’s supervisor. This behaviour is associated with better newcomer learning, task mastery, social integration and wellbeing (Ostroff & Kozlowski, 1992; Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler, & Saks, 2014; Saks et al., 2011). Newcomers who make the effort to build up a good relationship with their supervisor have more frequent communication with their supervisor, and therefore have more opportunities to fully understand their supervisor’s expectations for creativity. Moreover, supervisor relationship building may help newcomers implement their creative ideas due to the increased confidence that their supervisor may provide necessary information and share knowledge and expertise with them.
Prior research demonstrates that newcomers who put efforts into supervisor relationship building are, unsurprisingly, more likely to develop a good relationship with their supervisor (Cooper-Thomas, et al., 2014). In the case of positive work relationship, newcomers whose supervisors spend time understand the newcomer, in turn make the newcomer feel welcomed and valued, and thus more likely to voice their authentic opinions freely (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013). Moreover, mutual trust elicited from a good relationship motivates newcomers to engage in risk-taking behaviours without the fear of punishment (Graen & Cashman, 1975). Likewise, newcomers who receive support from their supervisor experience a psychologically safe context to initiate change, and are likely to reciprocate by generating new ideas (Perrot, Bauer, Abonneau, Campoy, Erdogan, & Liden, 2014). Following this reasoning, we propose that when newcomers are expected to be creative by their supervisors but lack peer support for creativity and innovation, newcomers high on supervisor relationship building likely feel able and confident towards innovative role orientation, and consequently supervisor relationship building, as a proactive behaviour, augments the effect of supervisor expectations for creativity on newcomers’ innovative role orientation.

In contrast, newcomers low on supervisor relationship building, when they concomitantly lack peer support for creativity and innovation, may have less chance to timely communicate with their supervisor, and less likely to establish and maintain a good relationship with supervisor. In this situation, they may lack the motivational drive to live up to supervisor’s requests, and therefore more likely to question supervisor expectations for creativity as risky. As a result, those newcomers might feel too insecure to be innovative and less prone to reacting to supervisor expectations for creativity.

However, when supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation are both high, the situation is consistent and clear that newcomer creativity and innovation are expected. This coherent context from peers and supervisor may make the proactive behaviour of supervisor relationship building redundant, just as Qu, Janssen and Shi (2017) stated, “high-quality exchange relationships appear well matched with creativity-enhancing conditions in the workplace” (p. 605). Therefore, when the environment already provides all the necessary information for the newcomer to be motivated and willing to act innovatively, newcomers low on supervisor relationship building are expected to benefit more from the environment of high supervisory expectation and high peer support.

Taken together, given that newcomers differ in the quality and quantity of their attempts and efforts in building good relationship with their supervisor (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016), we argue that supervisor relationship building will supplement for peer support for creativity and innovation, such that when peer support for creativity and innovation is low, supervisor relationship building will augment the association of supervisor expectations for creativity with innovative role orientation; in contrast when peer support for creativity and innovation is high, supervisor relationship building will have no additional impact on the interaction of supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation with innovative role orientation. We hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2**: The relationship between supervisor expectations for creativity and newcomer innovative role orientation is moderated by peer support for creativity and innovation and supervisor relationship building, such that when perceived peer support for creativity and innovation is low, supervisor expectation is more strongly related to innovative role orientation for those newcomers high on supervisor relationship building; when perceived peer support for
creativity and innovation is high, supervisor expectations for creativity is related more strongly to innovative role orientation for newcomers low on supervisor relationship building.

**METHOD**

**Sample and procedure**

Data were collected from recently graduated students from a university in the UK’s southwest at three time points following their initial entry: the first month (Time 1), second month (Time 2), and third month (Time 3). The Time 1 survey comprised personal information; the Time 2 asked about supervisor expectations for creativity and supervisor relationship building, and at Time 3 questions were on perceived peer support for creativity and innovation, and innovative role orientation. Email invitations were sent to graduates, requesting participation from those who had started a new job after graduation. Graduates are considered as more expensive employees because they are expected to bring new ideas and up-to-date knowledge, therefore an important resource for innovation. Also, sampling graduates helped us to collect data from a wide variety of organizations, showing variance in supervisor expectations for creativity, peer support for creativity and innovation, supervisor relationship building and innovative role orientation.

Participation was voluntary and was acknowledged with a gift voucher. One hundred and fifty-six newcomers responded to the Time 1 survey. Given the poor response rate, we sent out the Time 2 survey link to those participating at Time 1 and having submitted questionnaire, and also sent it out to the complete database of recent graduates along with the Time 2 survey (i.e., a combined Time 1 and Time 2 survey). Of the 113 respondents from Time 1 with complete data, 102 submitted a Time 2 survey. An additional 109 participants responded to the combined Time 1 and Time 2 survey. Of the 102 respondents to the standalone Time 2 survey, 94 submitted a Time 3 survey, with a further 82 of the 109 combined respondents returning a Time 3 survey. We cannot obtain a valid response rate for Time 1 or the combined Time 1 and Time 2 surveys as we do not know how many graduates met our criterion for participation.

Using regression analysis, we found no significant difference between two samples at Time 1 and Time 2 in terms of age, gender (‘0’ = male; ‘1’ = female), ethnicity (‘0’ = White; ‘1’ = other ethnic groups) or employment type (‘0’ = permanent; ‘1’ = other employment type). Therefore, we combined both samples, obtaining 176 responses. Of these, 161 completed all the surveys. This combined sample represented a large variety of occupations (e.g. accountants, lawyers, nurses, engineers) and industries (e.g. education, manufacturing, public services). The majority of participants were female (58.4%); they averaged 23.6 years in age. All of the participants were graduates with a university degree.

**Measures**

Likert agreement scales with 5 points were used across all measures (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”), with the exception of supervisor relationship building, which used ratings of amount (1 = “not at all” 5 = “to a great extent”).

**Supervisor expectations for creativity.** Supervisor expectations for creativity were assessed with a four-item scale from Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2007). An example item is “My supervisor expects me to be creative”.

**Peer support for creativity and innovation.** Peer support for creativity and innovation was measured using four items. The first two items were adapted from Ford and Gioia (2000), and the other two items were developed for this study. An example item is “People in my organization support me if I do things differently.”
Supervisor relationship building. Supervisor relationship building was measured using three items from Ashford and Black (1996). An example item is “Tried to develop your relationship with your supervisor?”

Innovative role orientation. Role orientation was measured with four items adapted from Jones (1986). An example item is “I have tried to change the procedures for doing my job and to institute new work goals”.

Control variables. Role theory suggests that individual attributes may influence the role perception and role behaviour (Katz & Khan, 1978). Therefore, we included demographic background (age, gender, and ethnicity) and employment type as the control variables.

Analytic strategy

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 for descriptive analyses and Amos 24 for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Evaluation of goodness-of-fit to the sample data was determined on the basis of multiple criteria: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Model fit is supported when RMSEA is below .08 (Beauducel & Wittmann, 2005), and CFI and TLI are close to .95 or above (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Interactive effects were tested by using hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Following the suggestion of Frazier, Tix and Barron (2004), when testing the moderating variables, the independent and moderating variables were standardized first using mean-centring to avoid multicollinearity issues. Following the suggestions of Cohen, West and Aiken (2003), we plotted significant interactions based on ± 1 SD from the mean.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, measurement reliabilities and correlations among variables are displayed in Table 1. Cronbach’s alphas for all the scales investigated in this study were above 0.7; there are significant positive correlations between both supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation with innovative role orientation, but not for supervisor relationship building with innovative role orientation.

Measurement Model

We ran confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to establish the discriminability of the constructs. The CFA results showed that all the individual standardized parameters estimated from the exogenous constructs to their corresponding indicators were statistically significant and sufficiently high, with the value more than 0.50 and less than 0.95. The 4-factor model (supervisor expectations for creativity, supervisor relationship building, peer support for creativity and innovation and innovative role orientation) provided an acceptable fit ($\chi^2$ (84, N = 161) = 130.01, $p = .001$; CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.059).

We compared the hypothesized measurement model with several alternative measurement models: 1) supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation combined as one latent factor; 2) supervisor expectations for creativity, peer support for creativity and innovation and supervisor relationship building combined as one latent factor; 3) supervisor expectations for creativity, peer support for creativity and innovation, supervisor relationship building and innovative role orientation combined as one latent factor. The results indicated that the hypothesized measurement model fit the data better than all the other alternative models ($\chi^2$ (87, N = 161) = 328.56, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.80, TLI = 0.76, RMSEA =
0.132; $\chi^2 (89, N = 161) = 545.26, p < .001; CFI = 0.63, TLI = 0.56, RMSEA = 0.179; \chi^2 (90, N = 161) = 755.38, p < .001; CFI = 0.46, TLI = 0.37, RMSEA = 0.215, respectively), providing support for the discriminant validity of our constructs.

**Common method variance assessment**

Given that all the main variables (supervisor expectations for creativity, supervisor relationship building, peer support for creativity and innovation and innovative role orientation) were reported by the participants themselves, Harman’s one-factor test was used to assess common method variance (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The first factor extracted accounted for only 42.66% of the total variance. In addition, to test for potential bias, we analysed the data comparing two measurement models (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). One measurement model included only the main variables and the other included a common latent factor also. The result shows that adding the common latent factor did not influence the model fit ($\chi^2 (83, N = 161) = 130.013, p = .001; CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.059), with the common latent factor accounting for none of the total variance. Overall, these tests suggested that common method variance was not a serious problem in these data.

**Hypothesis Testing**

We tested hypotheses using hierarchical regression analysis, building up the model in four steps that included first the control variables, then adding the main effects, two-way interactions, and three-way interactions. As shown in Table 2, the results for Step 4 demonstrated that gender (‘0’ = male; ‘1’ = female) and ethnicity (‘0’ = White’; ‘1’ = other ethnic groups’) were significantly related to innovative role orientation ($\beta = -.15, p = .049; \beta = .16, p = .04$, respectively). While there was no significant relationship between supervisor expectations for creativity and role orientation ($\beta = .14, p = .12$), the hypothesized 2-way interaction of supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation significantly predicted innovative role orientation ($\beta = .17, p = .04$). We mean-centred supervisor expectations for creativity and peer support for creativity and innovation and plotted the interaction, as shown in Figure 1. Under high peer support for creativity and innovation, supervisor expectations for creativity was associated with higher innovative role orientation; in contrast, when there was low peer support for creativity and innovation, there was no relationship between supervisor expectations for creativity and innovative role orientation. This supports Hypothesis 1.

For Hypothesis 2, the hypothesised three-way interaction was significant between supervisor expectations for creativity, peer support for creativity and innovation, and supervisor relationship building predicting innovative role orientation ($\beta = -.24, p = .01; \Delta R^2 = .04, p = .01$). The 3-way interaction is plotted in Figure 2. Results of slope differences tests, as suggested by Dawson and Richter (2006), are shown in Table 3. When either or both peer support for creativity and innovation and supervisor relationship building are high, the slopes of the regression lines are positive and show that higher levels of supervisor expectations for creativity are associated with newcomers having a more innovative role orientation; these lines do not significantly differ. However, under low perceived peer support for creativity and innovation and low supervisor relationship building, supervisor expectations for creativity are negatively associated with innovative role orientation, and this slope significantly differs from the other three slopes. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not fully supported.
DISCUSSION

This study attempts to unravel the conditions of when supervisor expectations for creativity is associated with newcomer innovative role orientation. Although supervisors and peers comprise the newcomer’s role set (Graen et al., 1973; Katz & Kahn, 1978), there has been little investigation of how their behaviour towards newcomer is interpreted to affect the newcomer’s role orientation. Our results indicate that one cannot take for granted a universal positive effect of supervisor expectation on newcomer role orientation, but rather this depends on the presence of certain boundary conditions – not least as there was no main effect found.

Role theory suggests that role receivers are not passive recipients reacting to the expectations of role-senders. Instead, they are active agents who can determine whether they are willing to accept legitimate authority and compliance with role-sender influences (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Following this argument, we first proposed a two-way interactive effect that perceived peer support for creativity and innovation augments the relationship of supervisor expectations for creativity on newcomer innovative role orientation. This finding largely supports the role theory perspective, indicating that supervisor expectations for creativity depends also on whether newcomers perceive peer support for creativity and innovation at the same time in order for these to be positively related to innovative role orientation. This finding is consistent with Katz and Kahn’s (1978) argument that role performance “does not occur in isolation” (p. 195). When employees have to respond to the varying and potentially conflicting expectations of multiple role set members, they may experience role conflict and psychological withdrawal (van Sell, Brief & Schuler, 1981). Our study shows the importance of considering different role senders within the new employees’ role set to provide a more complete picture of the influences on role orientation, and looks at whether coherence in these role-sender influences is associated with a greater likelihood of accepting the “sent” role. Our findings supported this notion, such that newcomers are inclined to fulfil supervisor expectations for creativity more so when these align with the role expectations from other agents who are also in the role set.

Moreover, in a line with the argument that the employee can be an active participant in facilitating the Pygmalion effect (Karalkowsky et al., 2012), we also investigated the role of supervisor relationship building as a proactive behaviour, reflecting the newcomer’s own role as a role-sender for oneself (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Previous socialization studies have primarily related supervisor relationship building to a variety of affective adjustment outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention) (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014; Saks et al., 2011), but too little attention has yet been given to the function of supervisor relationship building on newcomer role orientation. The present study begins to address this conceptual gap by identifying supervisor relationship building as an important contingent factor helping to compensate when the newcomer perceives a low level of peer support for creativity and innovation, and thus still enabling supervisor expectations for creativity to be positively associated with innovative role orientation. This finding improves our understanding of newcomer role orientation by highlighting the usefulness of newcomers’ efforts towards supervisor relationship building in facilitating innovative role orientation.

Additionally, we proposed that under the positive environment of high peer support, supervisor relationship building would have no additional motivational effect, and therefore would not be associated with a stronger relationship of supervisor expectations for creativity
with newcomer innovative role orientation. However, given the slope difference is not significant, this argument is not supported. Future study is needed to replicate this test.

Intriguingly we unexpectedly found that, when both boundary conditions are low – that is newcomers have not spent time building up a good relationship with their supervisor, and when they perceive that peers do not support creativity and innovation, there is a negative relationship between supervisor expectations for creativity and innovative role orientation. That is, under such conditions, in spite of supervisor expectations, in the absence of other support for innovation, newcomers revert to a safer, custodial role orientation. This surprising finding may be explained by reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), which suggesting when employees feel pressured but have few resources to enact desired behaviours, they may react against the lack of freedom and alternative choices, and attribute such expectations as coercive threats, resulting in acting the opposite of what the supervisor expects. In this case, newcomers who feel pressured to follow supervisor expectations for creativity, under challenging situations of low peer support and with little efforts on supervisor relationship building, are more likely to reject pressure and take a custodial role orientation. Future research is warranted to test this assumption.

In addition, although it was not our purpose to test the direct relationship between peer support for creativity and innovation and newcomer role orientation, the result shows a positive relationship in Step 4, indicating that newcomers are more likely to take innovative role orientation if they perceive peer support for creativity and innovation. This was the only significant main effect, and suggests that peers have a strong influence on newcomer role orientation. This result supports Yuan and Woodman’s (2010) argument that employees tend to feel psychological safety when they perceived social support at work workplace. Also, the finding fits with and extends the work of Scott and Bruce (1994) by examining the influence of peer support for creativity and innovation in the context of organizational socialization, indicating that peer support for creativity and innovation also play a key role fostering newcomer innovative role orientation in the same way as it is important for longer-tenured employees.

Taken together, our findings contribute to the literature in three major ways. First, this research goes beyond the traditional research stream on interactions between the newcomer and other role-senders (e.g., Major et al., 1995) by investigating more complex interaction effects that concurrently represent a broader set of contextual factors comprising the newcomer, their supervisor, and peers. Second, research in expectation-guided behaviour has typically focused on supervisor-subordinate dyads with different power and status, lack of explanation for the conditions under which managerial expectations can influence employee behaviours (Karakowdky et al., 2012). Therefore, we hope this study could shed much more light on contingent factors that enable or impede the Pygmalion phenomenon from the perspective of role theory. Third, our findings have implication for the proactivity literature by suggesting that newcomer supervisor relationship building can be a potential substitute of low level of peer support for creativity and innovation to facilitate innovative role orientation.

**Practical implications**

Given the importance of creativity and innovation for organizational development, considerable research efforts have been taken to discuss how to capitalise on the fresh skills and abilities of newcomers (Wang et al., 2015), and how to enhance employees’ willingness to bring creative ideas and act innovatively (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; Harris et al., 2014). However, as Qu et al. (2017) stated, leaders may hold high creativity expectations on followers, but followers may not develop congruent opinions towards creativity. During
socialization, newcomers may find that their supervisors and peers do not agree on how they should bring creative ideas and act innovatively. Our results reveal that when newcomers perceive low peer support for creativity and innovation, the level of supervisor expectation is unrelated to newcomer innovative role orientation. While supervisors may play a key role in encouraging innovative behaviour, as suggested in prior studies (Scott & Bruce, 1994) – although the main effect was not evident here – such expectations may flounder when broader support from colleagues is lacking. Thus, supervisors should consider the broader social environment and whether it is favourable for newcomers to attempt innovation at work, before themselves communicating their expectations for creativity. If it is not possible to ensure a socially supportive environment, supervisors’ expectations and exhortations to elicit innovative role orientation may be fruitless.

Our results also reveal that newcomer proactive efforts at supervisor relationship building are associated with a greater likelihood of supervisor expectations for creativity predicting newcomers taking an innovative role orientation, regardless of perceived peer support. It thus seems advisable to encourage newcomer proactive behaviour of supervisor relationship building by providing opportunities when the newcomer can enact this, not least the supervisor being receptive to the relationship building efforts of the newcomer.

**Limitations and future research**

Despite the contributions of the present study, some limitations should be considered and addressed in future research. First of all, past newcomer research has shown that organizational socialization tactics may influence newcomer role orientation (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Investiture tactics, for example, may be particularly fruitful to investigate, with Cable et al. (2013) suggesting these empower newcomers to feel supported and confident. In a related vein, we did not include other newcomer individual difference factors which may also influence innovative role orientation, such as creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2011).

Moreover, based on past research showing that supervisor relationship building predicts newcomers reporting a good relationship with their supervisor (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2014; Saks et al., 2011), we assumed that newcomers were able to build a good relationship with their supervisor, but we did not measure whether this was the case. Measuring this potential intermediary outcome of proactive behaviour aiming to build a positive supervisor-newcomer relationship would provide stronger evidence as to how supervisor expectations are translated into newcomer role orientation.

In addition, we do not know whether these findings generalize to other types of newcomer, for example newcomers with more years of work experience, or newcomers with a lower or higher level of education than a Bachelor’s degree. Likewise, although our theorizing is not tied to any cultural context, it is important to replicate our findings in non-Western contexts. All of our variables were measured using self-report data, which may have potential bias. Future research using data from supervisors or peers would offset such concerns.

**Conclusions**

Given that newcomers are often considered as new resources for the organization’s development and long-term survival, newcomer innovative role orientation may be expected and encouraged. Drawing from role theory, our study is the first attempt to investigate how supervisor, peer and newcomer factors interact to predict newcomer innovative role orientation. The contingency model tested highlights the role of individual and contextual factors that augment or weaken the association of supervisor expectations for creativity with newcomer innovative role orientation.
REFERENCES


Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Variables.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<td>1. Age</td>
<td>23.62</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Gender</td>
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<td>.49</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Ethnicity</td>
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<td>.33</td>
<td>.16*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>4. Employment type</td>
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<td>.48</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Supervisor</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.89)</td>
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<td>6. Peer support</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.84)</td>
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<td>7. Supervisor</td>
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<td>.15</td>
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<td>.09</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.83)</td>
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<td>8. Innovative role</td>
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<td>.87</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(.83)</td>
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*Note. N = 161. *p < .05  **p < .01.*
Table 2. Results of the Proposed Moderation Relationships based on Hierarchical Regression Test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 Control variables</th>
<th>Step1 β</th>
<th>Step2 β</th>
<th>Step3 β</th>
<th>Step4 β</th>
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<td>-.01</td>
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<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Step 2 Main effects**

| Supervisor expectations for creativity | .13    | .14     | .14     |
| Peer support for creativity and innovation | .21*   | .23*    | .28**   |
| Supervisor relationship building  | .06     | .08     | .12     |

**Step 3 2-way interactions**

| Supervisor expectations for creativity x Peer support for creativity and innovation | .21    | .17*   |
| Supervisor expectations for creativity x Supervisor relationship building | -.02   | .09    |
| Supervisor relationship building x Peer support for creativity and innovation | -.14   | -.20*  |

**Step 4 3-way interactions**

| Supervisor expectations for creativity x Peer support for creativity and innovation x Supervisor relationship building | -.24* |

| $R^2$ | .12 | .17 | .21 |
| Adjust $R^2$ | .08 | .12 | .15 |
| $\Delta R^2$ | .09** | .05* | .04* |
| $F$ | 1.437 | 3.101** | 3.092** | 3.515*** |

*Note. N = 161. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. 
Table 3. Simple Slopes Comparisons for Three-Way Interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair of slopes</th>
<th>t-value for slope difference</th>
<th>p-value for slope difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>(1) and (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) and (4)</td>
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<td>(2) and (4)</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) and (4)</td>
<td>2.02*</td>
<td>0.045</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. **p < .05. *** p < .001.
Figure 1.

Plot of 2-way Moderated Regression Showing Relationship between Supervisor Expectations for Creativity and Innovative Role Orientation under Combinations of High and Low Peer Support for Creativity and Innovation (Hypothesis 1)
Figure 2.

Plot of 3-way Moderated Regression Showing Relationship between Supervisor Expectations for Creativity and Innovative Role Orientation under Combinations of High and Low Peer Support for Creativity and Innovation and Supervisor Relationship Building (Hypothesis 2)