Newcomer innovative behavior: Factors that enable and inhibit

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It has long been recognized that new employees can be a source of innovation (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Given the key role of supervisors as socialization agents, we propose that supervisor expectations of creativity are critical to newcomers’ understanding of their role and requirements, and thus may influence newcomers’ innovative behavior. More specifically, subordinates who perceive their supervisors to have high expectations of their creativity may believe that their superiors trust their capabilities for creative work, and such expectations can elicit the Pygmalion effect which shapes subordinates’ behavior (Tierney & Farmer, 2004). However, although studies have advanced our understanding of the significance of supervisor expectations for subordinates’ creative performance (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007; Jiang & Gu, 2017), research has not yet adequately examined under what conditions supervisor expectations of creativity are more likely to influence employees’ willingness to implement creative ideas, that is, innovative behavior. Moreover, the supervisor’s influence may be especially influential for newcomers who are keen to get up to speed in their role, while integrating into the organization. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how newcomers’ perceptions of their supervisors, job and their own identification might interact to affect innovative behavior.

During work role transitions, newcomers develop a sense of organizational identity that influences how they think, feel, and act (Ashforth, Harrison, & Sluss, 2014). Newcomers’ interpretation of the organizational context, developed via social referents, will interactively
predict their role orientation (Ashforth & Saks, 1995). Identifying with their organization enables newcomers to achieve self-enhancement and reduce uncertainty (Zhu, Tatachari, & Chattopadhyay, 2017), gain feelings of personal control, and internalize organizational values and beliefs (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Yet organizational identification also has the potential for dysfunctional implications (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008) because feeling loyal to the organization and what the organization stands for (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) can involve supporting a suboptimal status quo (Conroy, Henle, Shore, & Stelman, 2017). Even when employees do not fully agree with the norms or practices of their organization, that is having high organizational identification, they may tolerate negative situations and be less likely to report dissatisfaction, which in turn reduces their likelihood of either initiating or implementing changes (Madjar, Greenberg, & Chen, 2011). However, for employees with low organizational identification, they are less likely to be restricted by norms and rules and more able to behave innovatively. Thus, when employees have low organizational identification, and therefore do not feel constrained by this, they are more liable to influence from other situational factors – specifically the expectations of their supervisor to behave innovatively. In contrast, for newcomers with higher organizational identification, they may prefer to maintain the status quo in order to provide stability in the organization that is a valued part of their identity, and under these conditions other situational factors, in this case supervisor expectations for creativity, will have little influence. Accordingly, we propose that organizational identification moderates the relationship between supervisory expectations and innovative behaviors, such that a low level of organizational identification enables this relationship, whereas high level of organizational identification attenuates this relationship.
Hypothesis 1: The relationship between supervisor expectations of creativity and newcomer innovative behavior is stronger when newcomers have a lower level of organizational identification, and weaker when newcomers have a higher level of organizational identification.

Job autonomy is a resource that provides employees with freedom to decide how to do their work (Jiang & Gu, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Employees are more likely to test ideas (Krause, 2004) and implement innovative initiatives (Axtell et al., 2000) when they construe contexts providing them with autonomy. Studies of creativity have revealed that employees produce more creative work when they have control over how to perform tasks (Hammond, Neff, Farr, Schwall, & Zhao, 2011). Therefore, we propose that perceptions of high job autonomy strengthen the interactive effects of supervisor expectations of creativity and organizational identification on newcomer innovative behavior.

Hypothesis 2: The relationship between supervisor expectations of creativity and newcomer innovative behavior is stronger when newcomers have a lower level of organizational identification and a higher level of job autonomy.

To test our ideas, we collected data from 102 graduates from a university in south China at two times: Time 1 was four months post-graduation (average job tenure 101 days), and Time 2 was two months later. At Time 1 we included measures of supervisor expectations of creativity and job autonomy; at Time 2 we measured organizational identification and innovative behavior. The translation back-translation method suggested by Brislin (1986) was applied to develop the Chinese version of the survey. Likert agreement scales with 5 points were used across all measures (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”). Meanwhile, given the potential positive relationship between work engagement and innovative behaviors (e.g., Agarwal, Datta, Blake-
Beard, & Bhargava, 2012), we controlled work engagement in this study. All measurement items are shown in Appendix A.

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 for descriptive analyses and Amos 24 for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We established the proposed measurement model as being superior to plausible alternative measurement models. CFA specifying a 5-factor model provided an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 (109, N = 102) = 179.865, p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.94, IFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.08). Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and correlations of all variables are presented in Table 1. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were assessed with hierarchical regression, and the results are presented in Table 2.

As demonstrated in Table 2, supervisor expectations for creativity positively predicted newcomer innovative behavior. For the moderators, when newcomer organizational identification was high, this positive relationship was weaker; whereas when newcomer job autonomy was high, this positive relationship was stronger (see Figure 1). For the three-way interaction, job autonomy strengthened the interaction of organizational identification with supervisory expectation of creativity in predicting newcomer innovative behavior (see Figure 2). Thus, newcomers reported more innovative behavior in line with supervisor expectations when they had high job autonomy and low organizational identification. Both hypotheses were supported.

Although our data are self-report, with the implication of potential common method biases, such biases deflate interaction terms (Siemensen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010). Also, the sample size of the study was fairly small. In spite of these limitations, this study is the first to investigate the interactive effects of supervisor expectations, organizational identification and job autonomy on newcomer innovative behaviours. The understanding of motivation underlying newcomer
innovative behaviours may enable practitioners to cultivate constructive conditions to facilitate newcomer innovative behavior.

References


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

<table>
<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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Supervisor expectations of creativity</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.88)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Organizational Identification</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Job autonomy</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Innovative behavior</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work engagement</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.34***</td>
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</table>

Note. N = 102. Reliabilities are in parentheses. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
Table 2.
*Results of the proposed indirect relationships.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Innovative behavior</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
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<td>Organizational identification</td>
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<td>Job autonomy</td>
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<td><strong>Step 3: 2-way interactive effect</strong></td>
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<td>Supervisory expectations of creativity $\times$ organizational identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervisory expectations of creativity $\times$ job autonomy</td>
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<td>Organizational identification $\times$ job autonomy</td>
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<td><strong>Step 4: 3-way interactive effect</strong></td>
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</table>

*Note. N = 102. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$*
Interactive effects of supervisor expectations of creativity and organizational identification on newcomer innovative behavior
Figure 2.

*Interactive effects of supervisor expectations of creativity, organizational identification and job autonomy on newcomer innovative behavior*
Appendix A

*Items used to measure the study variables.*

**Time 1  Supervisor expectations for creativity (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007)**
1. My supervisors think of me as a creative employee.
2. My supervisor thinks that creativity is important to me.
3. My supervisor expects me to be creative.
4. My supervisor would probably be disappointed in me if I was not creative.

**Time 1  Job autonomy (Breaugh, 1985)**
1. I am allowed to decide how to go about getting my job done (the methods to use).
2. I am able to choose the way to go about my job (the procedures to utilize).
3. I am free to choose the method(s) to use in carrying out my work.
4. I have control over the scheduling of my work.

**Time 2  Organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992)**
1. The organization's successes are my successes.
2. When someone criticizes the organization, it feels like a personal insult.
3. When I talk about the organization, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.
4. I am very interested in what others think about my organization.
5. When someone praises this organization, it feels like a personal compliment.
6. If a story in the media criticized the organization, I would feel embarrassed.

**Time 2  Innovative behaviour (Scott & Bruce, 1994)**
1. I search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.
2. I generate creative ideas.
3. I promote and champion ideas to others.
4. I investigate and secure funds needed to implement new ideas.
5. I develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas.
6. I am innovative.

**Time 2  Control variable - Work engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2006)**
1. At my work, I feel full of energy.
2. In my job, I feel strong and vigorous.
3. I am enthusiastic about my job.
4. My job inspires me.
5. I feel happy when I am working intensely.
6. I am immersed in my work.