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HOW INTERNS IMPACT WORK TEAMS: EXAMINING NEWCOMER SOCIALIZATION
AND PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS AMONG INTERNS, TEAM LEADERS, AND
TEAM MEMBERS

LINDA L. BARTELT
Dr. Jon M. Werner, Dissertation Chair

ABSTRACT

Every day, hundreds of college interns join organizations as the race for highly skilled talent escalates. Two-thirds of college graduates now have at least one internship experience, with nearly fifty percent of interns becoming full-time employees in their sponsoring organization (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2019). If internships are the nexus for an organization's entry-level jobs, why is there scant empirical evidence on the impact of interns in today's environment of agile, work teams? This dissertation examines how interns impact work teams based on newcomer socialization theory and the influence of positive expectations on enhancing performance and productivity building on the Pygmalion and Galatea theories. A mixed methods approach is used, whereby both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are used in two related essays (Onwuegbuzie & Corrigan, 2014).

Essay One consists of two parts or studies. Study one is an interpretative study that seeks to extend the theories of newcomer sensemaking and sensegiving (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) to interns as organizational newcomers. The research evaluates the cues and signals that are sent by team leaders and team members to interns and the cyclical process of interpretation and proactive behaviors. Within the socialization framework, interns adapt and perform which reinforces the commitment of social inclusion - you are one of us. Study two (in Essay One) provides quantifiable evidence that interns have a positive impact on work teams based on team leaders and team members average impact rating.

Essay Two emphasizes newcomer socialization theory and broadens the conceptual framework to examine the relationships of newcomer/interns, team leaders, and team members during the process of social adjustment. A three-month field study was conducted among diverse

work teams – with full responses from 71 interns, 45 team leaders, and 40 team members in manufacturing, technology, and professional services firms. Building on the Pygmalion and Galatea theories, the model defines the relationship of expectations from newcomer/interns, team leaders, and team members on intern empowerment and role performance mediated by social exchanges (Chen & Klimoski, 2003; Chen, 2005). Intern performance expectations had a significant, positive influence on social exchanges with his or her team leader, team member, and the intern's sense of empowerment. Furthermore, team leader and team member performance expectations positively influenced their ratings of intern role performance.

This dissertation seeks to expand the body of knowledge of newcomer socialization and to develop a greater understanding of the interdependent process between newcomer/interns, their social context, and their relationships among team leaders and team members. Furthermore, it answers the call from practitioners to quantify the strategic value of internships.

Keywords: Newcomer Socialization; Sensemaking; Pygmalion and Galatea Theory; Internships