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Becoming Insiders: Examining the Roles of Onboarding Practices, Power Distance Orientation and Expectation-Experience Discrepancies in Newcomers' Organizational Socialization Outcomes in Startup Firms

CAI Jinxin

Doctor of Management

Supervisors:
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March, 2024

Marketing, Operations and General Management Department

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I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate the dynamics of onboarding practices and organizational socialization in startup firms, recognizing the crucial role of newcomers. Specifically, it investigates how startup firms with limited resources stimulate newcomers to transition into organizational insiders through onboarding practices, and how newcomers' power distance orientations and expectation-experience discrepancies affect their adjustment and organizational socialization results.

Drawing on the literature on organizational socialization and the ability-motivation-opportunity model, this study has examined the relationships among onboarding practices affect newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement), newcomers' power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies. Through a quantitative study involving 620 newcomers in 84 cultural and creative startup firms in Chengdu and Hangzhou, the study confirms 28 out of 36 hypothesized relationships.

Findings reveal the significant influence of onboarding practices on newcomers' adjustment in startup firms, uncover the moderating effect of newcomers' power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies, and the partial mediating role of newcomer adjustment, particularly role clarity, on the relationship between adjustment and socialization outcomes.

The study contributes to the literature by providing insights into the nuanced interplay between onboarding practices, adjustment, and socialization outcomes, while highlighting the necessity of managing newcomers' expectations and experiences for enhanced organizational outcomes. It provides valuable insights for practitioners, emphasizing the need for tailored onboarding practices and proactive management of newcomers' expectations to foster successful integration and enhance organizational outcomes in the fast-paced and ever-evolving startup ecosystem.

Keywords: Newcomers, organizational socialization, adjustment outcomes, power distance orientation, expectation-experience discrepancies, startup firms

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Resumo

Esta tese tem como objetivo examinar a dinâmica das práticas de integração e socialização organizacional em empresas startups, reconhecendo o papel crucial dos recém-chegados. Especificamente, analisa como as empresas iniciantes com recursos limitados estimulam os recém-chegados a fazer a transição para membros organizacionais por meio de práticas de integração, e como a perceção de distância ao poder e as discrepâncias percebidas entre experiência e expectativa dos recém-chegados afetam seus resultados de ajuste e socialização organizacional.

Com base na literatura sobre socialização organizacional e no modelo de capacidade-motivação-oportunidade, este estudo examinou as relações entre as práticas de integração que afetam os resultados de ajuste dos recém-chegados (i.e., clareza de papéis, autoeficácia e aceitação social), os resultados da socialização organizacional (i.e., comportamento de ajuda, desempenho no trabalho e envolvimento no trabalho), a orientação à distância de poder dos recém-chegados e as discrepâncias entre expectativa e experiência. Através de um estudo quantitativo envolvendo 620 recém-chegados em 84 empresas startups culturais e criativas em Chengdu e Hangzhou, o estudo confirma 28 de 36 relações hipotéticas.

Os resultados revelam a influência significativa das práticas de integração no ajuste dos recém-chegados em empresas iniciantes, revelam o efeito moderador das discrepâncias percebidas entre expectativa-experiência dos recém-chegados e da distância ao poder, assim como o papel mediador parcial do ajuste dos recém-chegados, particularmente a clareza de papéis, na relação entre os resultados de ajuste e socialização.

O estudo contribui para a literatura fornecendo insights sobre a interligação entre práticas de integração, ajuste e resultados de socialização, ao mesmo tempo em que destaca a necessidade de gerir as expectativas e experiências dos recém-chegados para melhorar os resultados organizacionais. O estudo fornece informações valiosas para os profissionais, enfatizando a necessidade de práticas de integração personalizadas e gestão proativa das expectativas dos recém-chegados para promover uma integração bem-sucedida e melhorar os resultados organizacionais no ecossistema de startups em ritmo acelerado e em constante evolução.

摘 要

　　本文在新员工的关键作用基础上，旨在探讨初创企业的入职实践和组织社会化的动态。具体来说，它研究了资源有限的初创公司如何通过入职实践激励新来者转变为组织内部人士，以及新来者的权力距离取向和期望-经验差异如何影响他们的适应和组织社会化结果。具体而言，它研究了初创企业如何通过入职实践激励新人过渡成为组织内部人员，以及新人的权力距离取向和期望-经验差异如何影响他们的自我适应以及组织社会化结果。

　　本研究利用有关组织社会化和能力-动机-机会模型的文献，研究了入职实践对新来者的适应结果（即角色清晰度、自我效能感和社会接受度）、组织社会化结果（即帮助行为、工作绩效和工作投入）、新员工的权力距离取向和期望-经验差异之间的关系。通过对成都和杭州的 84 家文化和创意初创公司的 620 名新员工进行的定量研究，本研究证实了 36 个假设关系中的 28 个。

　　研究结果表明，入职实践对新创企业的新员工适应有显著影响，揭示了新员工的权力距离取向和期望-体验差异的调节作用，以及新员工适应，特别是角色清晰度对调整与社会化结果关系的部分中介作用。

　　该研究通过洞察入职实践、调整和社会化结果之间微妙的相互作用，提供了文献，同时强调了管理新来者的期望和经验的必要性，以增强组织结果。它为从业者提供了有价值的见解，强调需要量身定制的入职实践和主动管理新员工的期望，以促进在快速和不断发展的初创公司生态系统中的成功整合和增强组织成果。

关键词：新员工，组织社会化，适应结果，权力距离导向，期望-经验差异，初创企业

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research background

Startup firms have drawn increasing attention from researchers and practitioners (Hernandez & Menon, 2021; Luo et al., 2021; Spender et al., 2017), due to their contributions to employment, innovations (Barboza & Capocchi, 2020) and local economy (Hillemane et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Small Business Administration (2019), startups often take the form of small business, which contribute to 44 percent of the economic activities and create two-thirds of net new jobs and driving innovation and competitiveness in the U.S. In particular, startup firms are essential to economies (Dalmarco et al., 2018; Quinones et al., 2015) where innovation facilitates successful transitions to high-quality development (R. Wang & Zhou, 2020).

A startup refers to a firm or a temporary organization where entrepreneurs are committed to fostering business ideas into repeatable and scalable business models to sense and seize market opportunities and social impacts (Blank, 2013; Brattström, 2019). Bosma et al. (2021) reported a stable total early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA), i.e., the ratio of the 18-64 years' old adults who starting or running a new business, among the 43 economics in 2020. Such findings confirmed the magnified role of startup firms in marketing new ideas, despite the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite their potentials, startup firms often experience a short survival rate during the full life cycle of pre-seed, seed, growth, establishment, and consolidation stages (Greiner, 1998); with the failure rate especially high during the early stages (i.e., pre-seed & seed) (Gelderen et al., 2005; Szerb & Vörös, 2021). In the 2020/21 global entrepreneurship report, the high TEA (32.4%) in the investigated economies (e.g., Panama) was contrasted with rather low (4.1%) established business ownership rate, i.e., the rate of 18-64 years' old adults who are owning or running a wage-paying business over 42 months (3.5 years) (Bosma et al., 2021).

The low rate of early-stage survival of startup firms has attracted attention from researchers such as Abatecola and Uli (2016) who attribute such a problem to the liability of newness, i.e., difficulties for startup firms to effectively compete established organizations (Gimenez-Fernandez et al., 2020; Stinchcombe, 1965) and liability of smallness, i.e., lacking

the necessary resources to support the business routines required for strategy implementation (López et al., 2019).

The liability of newness and liability of smallness often result in a range of challenges, including insufficient initial capital, difficulty to obtain legitimacy (i.e., societal acceptance & brand reputation), insufficient industry experience, small teams with poor coordination and limited competences, and more importantly, failure to attract and retain talents (Buschow, 2020; Harney & Alkhalaf, 2020; Neumann, 2021). These challenges can significantly impact the success and growth of startups.

Against the above backdrop, previous studies have examined the roles of product development and the various characteristics (e.g., personal values, competences, creativity, social capital, human capital, and education) of entrepreneurs (Abatecola & Uli, 2016; S. O. Becker & Hvide, 2022; Hasan & Koning, 2019; Hemingway, 2005; Kimakwa et al., 2021; Rocha & Van Praag, 2020; Shepherd & Gruber, 2021; Zhan et al., 2020). However, Brattström (2019) and Braun et al. (2017) critiqued this 'one man's show' in startup research, where the focus is on entrepreneurs and suggest a post-heroic view to shift the focus from the powerful leader towards the specific leadership practices implemented towards employees throughout the organization.

The post-heroic view is supported by the fact that startup firms are often founded and administered by teams rather than entrepreneurs per se, especially in knowledge-intensive startup firms where innovation and growth require stable and unified efforts from team members (Brattström, 2019). In other words, the post-heroic view provides a complementary explanation to the short survival rate of startup firms: a shortage of financial and human resources hinders the development of startup firms; moreover, it presents a challenge for startup firms: with limited financial resources, how to recruit, train, and motivate scalable talents, and help them to efficiently transition from organizational outsiders into organizational insiders to support the firm's growth and consolidation?

Regis (2019) survey on startup firms in Algeria confirmed that 33 per cent of startup firms faced the challenges related to human resources. On the surface, human resource challenges come from the cost, quality and availability of labor forces, but these forces hardly explain the increasing number of university graduates and the ever-growing labor market. Researchers suggest that the underlying challenges originate from lack of employer attractiveness, unhealthy (e.g., abusive) environment, social meaningfulness, and motivation (Buchko et al., 2017; Styvén et al., 2022).

Moreover, startup employees often share homogeneity in their cultural and technical

backgrounds and skills, making the firms unable to undertake tasks that require heterogeneous expertise to seize new business opportunities (McKelvie et al., 2018). Such homogeneity can be attributed to entrepreneurs who seek employees from their own social networks, as well as job candidates who tend to team up with those who share specific backgrounds (e.g., education & places of birth) in order to form smaller groups where trust and coordination become easy within startup firms (Brattström & Richtnér, 2014; Cooper et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, homogenous teams lead startup firms to problems such as cognitive and social blindness (Steffens et al., 2012), inabilities to gather the diverse skills, abilities, perspectives, and social capital required for growth (Brattström, 2019; Van Knippenberg et al., 2015), as well as the missing authority required to take leadership and clarify relations and roles at work (Jung et al., 2017; Reagans et al., 2004).

As such, researchers such as Brattström (2019), Buschow (2020), Kwapisz et al. (2014) and Wise et al. (2022) suggest the introduction of heterogenous employees for startup firms to develop the advantages in the competitive and dynamic market. Indeed, heterogeneous staffing could generate the complementary expertise and practices that facilitate innovation (Buschow, 2020).

1.2 Research problem

The above discussion indicates that startup firms need to introduce heterogeneous and complementary 'outsiders' (i.e., newcomers). However, before reaping contributions of newcomers, startup firms need to help these individuals to adjust to the new work environment, integrate into the social aspects of their roles, so that they can behave according to the various expectations and blend into the organizational culture within startup firms; this type of human resource practices is known as onboarding (Bauer et al., 2007; Pratiwi et al., 2018; Wiseman et al., 2022).

Onboarding has become an essential approach for firms to develop and retain qualified newcomers (Tumasjan et al., 2019). The concept of onboarding is often used interchangeably with organizational socialization, i.e., the process through which newcomers transition from organizational outsiders to organizational insiders (Taormina, 1997). Organizational socialization involves the process where newcomers access top relevant information, reduce uncertainty, and obtain insiders' acceptance and support, for the purpose of successful adjustment to the new roles (R. Fang et al., 2017).

However, Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2013) remind that onboarding and organizational

socialization are two constructs that differ in a number of ways: first, onboarding reflects organizational endeavor and practices to facilitate employee socialization, whereas organizational socialization often happens to individual newcomers; second, onboarding takes place earlier, i.e., when a newcomer just joins the organization, while organizational socialization involves a continuous process that lasts throughout the newcomers' career within the organization (Anderson & Thomas, 1996; S. O. Becker & Hvide, 2022; Capitano et al., 2021).

So far, the literature on newcomer onboarding has primarily focused on how onboarding practices promote newcomers' adjustment and learning (Ashforth, 2012; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 2006), helping newcomers to develop improved role clarity and self-efficacy, as well as social acceptance from insiders; thereby further influencing organizational socialization outcomes such as increased job engagement and helping behavior, as well as improved performance (Bauer et al., 2007; R. Fang et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2021; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016; Y. Song et al., 2017).

Most of the above studies have mostly focused on large corporations. For instance, Carucci (2018) suggested an organizational-, social-, and technical-integration approach to develop effective onboarding practices, although his experience comes from Fortune 500 companies. However, startup firms can differ from large corporations in a number of ways. First, unlike large corporations that adopt formal and routinized onboarding practices (Wiseman et al., 2022), small and medium-sized startup firms often take less formal and more reactive approaches (Gilbert & Jones, 2000; Harney & Alkhalaf, 2020).

Regardless of their previous work experience, entrepreneurs are often occupied with administrative roles such as accounting and logistics, which are often undertaken by administrative department in large corporations (Buschow, 2020). This suggests that entrepreneurs and even core founders may have limited time and resources to provide formal onboarding practices to newcomers. Moreover, startup firms need a high degree of flexibility to address the volatile and dynamic market requirements (Ma et al., 2020; Mazzarol, 2003).

Newcomers may therefore experience higher level of involvement in a wide range of activities that are emerging, so formal onboarding practices on these situations may not exist. As a result, the one-size-fit-all approach to onboarding practices may not generate the desired organizational socialization results from newcomers.

Second, some researchers such as Bauer et al. (2007), Gupta et al. (2017), J. Liu et al. (2021), Ou et al. (2016) and J. Wang and Kim (2013) have recognized the importance of interpersonal relations in the organizational socialization process (i.e., adjustment) of

newcomers. These researchers have identified several contingent factors that influence the outcomes of newcomer organizational socialization, such as newcomers' proactive socialization behaviors and newcomers' perceived insider status. However, these studies often assume a static view regarding newcomers' organizational socialization process.

In fact, newcomers may perceive discrepancies between their expected relationships and the actual experiences during the organizational socialization processes. Such discrepancies could result from the various unexpected situations occurring within startup firms, as well as the newcomers' interactions with not only their direct managers (e.g., entrepreneurs) but also horizontal peers. For instance, entrepreneurs and other insiders may provide support and guidance to newcomers at the beginning, but later decide to withdraw their support for various reasons (e.g., change of startup directions and newcomer underperformance) (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013).

Not much research has been conducted on the sources of expectation-experience discrepancies that newcomers encounter in startup firms, and less is known about how such discrepancies could moderate the impact of onboarding practices on newcomers' organizational socialization results within startup firms. Another factor that may influence the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment could be newcomer's power distance orientation. In higher power distance cultures such as China, onboarding instructors (e.g., entrepreneurs and mentors) often assume the role of teachers and even parents to newcomers (Hu et al., 2020).

Studying newcomer's power distance orientation, i.e., newcomers' acceptance of status gaps with the power over their supervisors and peers is particularly important in the startup firms of from various cultural values (J. Song et al., 2019). Following Kwan et al. (2021), this study takes newcomers' power distance orientation as an individual trait rather than any specific national value; doing so could generalize our findings regarding how newcomers develop internal cognition to the onboarding practices of startup firms that operate in ambiguous and uncertain settings and can spare limited resources to newcomers.

1.3 Research objectives and research questions

Drawing on the above discussion, this study aims to develop essential insights into how startup firms that operate in uncertainty and ambiguity and with limited resources stimulate newcomers to transition into organizational insiders through onboarding practices, and how newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies and power distance orientations affect their

adjustment, thereby affecting their organizational socialization results. Specifically, the objectives of this study involve the examination of:

(1) How onboarding practices developed by startup firms influence newcomers' adjustment results

(2) The role of newcomer's power distance orientation in the above relationship

(3) How newcomers' adjustment results affect newcomers' organizational socialization results.

(4) The role of newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies in the above relationships.

The following research questions are developed to achieve these research objectives:

RQ1: How do startup firms' onboarding practices affect newcomers' adjustment?

RQ2: How does newcomers' power distance orientation affect the above relationship?

RQ3: How do newcomers' adjustment results affect their organizational socialization results?

RQ4: How do newcomer adjustment results mediate the relationship between onboarding practices and socialization results?

RQ5: How do newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies affect the impact of newcomer adjustment results on socialization results?

1.4 Research methods

This study integrates the theoretical framework of ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) model (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013) and organizational socialization (Bauer et al., 2007) into the literature on onboarding practices, newcomer adjustment, power distance orientation, and expectation-experience discrepancies within the context of startup firms to examine the mechanisms underpinning newcomers' organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement). It empirically tests the relationships among onboarding practices, newcomers' adjustment results (role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), newcomers' socialization results, newcomer's power distance orientation, and newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies before and after onboarding practices. The target respondents of this research are newcomers within 24 months of experience in startup firms in China.

To examine the relationships between key variables, the researcher adopted a quantitative research approach to answer the research questions mentioned in Section 1.3. The data were

collected through online questionnaire surveys to newcomers and their immediate supervisors.

Specifically, the statistical methods used in this study include descriptive analysis, reliability and validity tests, and multiple regression analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the demographic information of newcomers and their supervisors. Multiple regression analysis was administered to investigate the predictors of newcomers' socialization results in startup firms. The statistical software SPSS Statistics 25 package was utilized to conduct descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis.

1.5 Research significance

The study included in this thesis contributes with significant implications for both researchers and practitioners in the realm of startup firms' onboarding practices and newcomers' organizational socialization.

Firstly, this study examined startup firms' onboarding practices by adopting the Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) model. In doing so, the study provides a systematic perspective to the sporadic practices involved in startup firms' onboarding practices. More importantly, it extends the previous studies by constructing and verifying a conceptual framework to understand how those practices enhance newcomers' abilities, motivations, and opportunities, ultimately influencing their adjustment and socialization results.

Secondly, the empirical verification of the role of startup firms' onboarding practices in newcomers' adjustment results aligns with established theories such as Bauer et al. (2007)'s work on reducing uncertainty in newcomers' work environment and Van Maanen and Schein (1977)'s organizational socialization model. The study emphasizes the importance of going beyond traditional practices, such as job descriptions, to actively help newcomers develop clear understanding of their roles, improve skills and confidence, fostering a sense of belonging and social acceptance crucial for their integration into the organizational culture within startup firms.

Thirdly, the research confirms the significance of newcomers' adjustment in organizational socialization outcomes, shedding light on the mechanisms through which role clarity and self-efficacy influence helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement. By verifying these relationships, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how onboarding practices can facilitate newcomers' transition into organizational insiders, particularly in the unique context of startup firms.

Moreover, the study highlights the moderating effects of newcomers' power distance

orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies, offering nuanced insights into the complexities of adjustment and socialization processes within startups. These findings provide valuable guidance for startup practitioners, emphasizing the need for tailored onboarding programs that address newcomers' diverse needs and expectations.

Fourthly, the managerial implications outlined in the thesis offer actionable strategies for startup firms, human resource professionals, and line managers to optimize the onboarding experience and foster a supportive work environment conducive to newcomers' integration and success, especially in startup firms. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on organizational socialization in startup firms, offering theoretical insights and practical recommendations to enhance organizational outcomes in this dynamic and evolving context.

Fifthly, this research holds significance for startup founders and leaders who are tasked with developing effective onboarding strategies and nurturing a culture of inclusivity and support. By understanding the importance of onboarding practices in shaping newcomers' perceptions and experiences, as well as newcomers' power distance orientation, founders can prioritize resources and efforts towards creating comprehensive onboarding programs that address both the tangible skills needed for job success and the intangible factors like motivation and social integration.

Moreover, the findings highlight the crucial role of managers and human resource professionals in facilitating newcomers' adjustment and socialization processes. By providing clear role expectations, fostering self-efficacy, and promoting social acceptance, managers can set the stage for newcomers to thrive within the startup environment.

1.6 Thesis structure

The rest part of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the literature review regarding the theoretical perspectives on newcomers' organizational socialization (especially in the context of startup firms), newcomer adjustment, power distance orientation, and expectation-experience discrepancies, and socialization results in startup firms.

Chapter 3 draws on the relevant literature to present the hypotheses regarding the relationships between the predictor variables (i.e., onboarding practices, role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance, power distance orientation, and expectation-experience discrepancies) and socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement).

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology for this quantitative study of newcomers' organizational socialization in startup firms, including the research design and data collection procedures, questionnaire design, demographic information and initial analysis results (i.e., reliability and validity).

Chapter 5 presents the results of the quantitative analysis, including the model assessment results, multicollinearity assessment results, correlation analysis results, and hypothesis testing results.

Chapter 6 compares the key results with the relevant literature to highlight the contributions to the literature and managerial practices within startup firms. This chapter also reflects on possible limitations and suggests directions for future studies.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to identify and discuss the theories related to newcomers' organizational socialization process, themes identified in the process (e.g., startup firms' onboarding practices, newcomer adjustment, and organizational socialization outcomes), and moderating factors (e.g., expectation-experience discrepancies and power distance orientation) related to those practices, identify and define the key variables, develop hypotheses related to their relationships, and finally present the conceptual framework of this study.

It first provides an overview of the theories related to newcomers' organizational socialization in startup firms, including cognitive and sensemaking theory, uncertainty reduction theory, socialization resource theory, social exchange theory, and leader-member exchange theory (Section 2.2). This discussion leads to the justification of adopting an interactionist perspective that integrates the above theories to interpret the process of newcomer organizational socialization in startup firms.

Subsequently, Section 2.3 summarizes the themes along the development of organizational socialization; and in doing so, it identifies the relevant themes and subthemes throughout the process of newcomer organizational socialization in startup firms. This involves the ability-motivation-opportunity enhancing practices, components of newcomer adjustment (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), components of newcomers' organizational socialization results (e.g., job performance, helping behavior, and job engagement), as well as two moderating factors (i.e., newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies and power distance orientation) during the above process. The purpose is to explore startup firms' efforts to enhance newcomer's organizational socialization.

2.2 Theoretical perspectives on newcomers' organizational socialization

Scholars such as Reissner et al. (2019) have adopted several theoretical perspectives to explain the underlying mechanisms related to newcomers' organizational socialization process, including cognitive and sensemaking theory, uncertainty reduction theory (Cooper et

al., 2021), socialization resource theory (Cranmer et al., 2017; A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2011), social exchange theory (Jia et al., 2021; Sluss & Thompson, 2012), and social exchange theory (L. Zhang et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Cognitive and sense making theory

The cognitive and sensemaking theory is an important theory in explaining the socialization process of newcomers into organizations. According to the cognitive and sense making theory (Louis, 1980), the socialization of a newcomer into a new role provides opportunities for both the newcomer and the employer to improve current practices. In particular, this theory emphasizes the significance of sensemaking, sense-giving, and sense-testing in the socialization process (Kowtha, 2018). During the socialization process, newcomers often face unfamiliar cues, which can lead to uncertainty and cognitive dissonance. In order to reduce uncertainty brought about by these cues, newcomers are motivated to seek the relevant information and engage in a sensemaking process (Beus et al., 2014). In this case, newcomers will try to use the relevant information and their cognitive processes to understand the surprising encounters during the socialization. This is achieved by creating meaning from experiences and accessing or developing cognitive scripts to reduce uncertainties in those encounters (Good & Cavanagh, 2017).

During the process of socialization, newcomers' cognitive learning and adjustment are significantly affected by the quality of interactions between colleagues and supervisors (Ellis et al., 2017). These interactions are influenced by individual factors such as predispositions, insider assistance, and past experiences of newcomers. For instance, newcomers' proactive behaviors such as information seeking, learning about organizational expectations, and engaging in sensemaking processes can allow them to manage uncertainty effectively (Zhao et al., 2023). Indeed, organizational insiders such as supervisors and coworkers can provide newcomers with the relevant information, exposing them to the reality where their sense making can be validated.

Moreover, Delton and Cimino (2010) pointed out that the cognitive process of a newcomer concept involves various personal and situational factors that interactively influence the cognitive processes of newcomers entering organizations. As a result, understanding individual and situational factors affecting the socialization of newcomers into organizations is essential. So far, the identified factors include acquiring new skills, developing ties to high-rank colleagues, and tenure length, which can affect how newcomers

are perceived and how they adapt to new environments (Delton & Cimino, 2010). This theory emphasizes that newcomers need situation-specific or culture-specific interpretation schemes to make sense of happenings in the setting and to respond meaningfully (P. Zhang & Soergel, 2014). The socialization of newcomers into an organization can be considered as a sense-making process, where newcomers rely on their cognitive processes to cope with and understand the new work environment (L. Harris et al., 2020).

The cognitive and sensemaking theory emphasizes that newcomers need situation-specific or culture-specific interpretation schemes to make sense of happenings in the setting and to respond meaningfully (P. Zhang & Soergel, 2014). The socialization of newcomers into an organization can be considered as a sense-making process, where newcomers rely on their cognitive processes to cope with and understand the new work environment (L. Harris et al., 2020). According to Ito and Inohara (2015), the sensemaking process involves interpreting stimuli, constructing cognitive frames, and developing mental schemata to navigate unfamiliar situations effectively.

From a situational perspective, the unique contexts of startup firms indeed present distinct challenges for newcomers, as highlighted by Ashforth et al. (2018), Cooper et al. (2021), S. Liu et al. (2015), and A. M. Saks and Gruman (2018). These challenges are exacerbated by the rapidly changing macro-environments in which startups operate, where customer demands, technological advances, and market conditions shift swiftly (Khan et al., 2023). In such volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) contexts, traditional onboarding practices may struggle to effectively communicate organizational priorities and task requirements to newcomers. Therefore, formal onboarding practices that are designed for stable environments in large corporates may not suit the dynamic nature of the startup firms.

Moreover, formal onboarding practices, while beneficial in stable and large corporate environments, may not be practical for startup firms due to their limited resources and newcomers' need for hands-on experience and on-the-job training. Studies have documented startup firms' operations with limited resources, such as time, budget, and human resources; these restraints collectively make the implementation of comprehensive and formal onboarding programs a challenge (Frögéli & Backström Eriksson, 2023; Horne et al., 2020). Hence, comprehensive and formal onboarding programs that take significant time and investment may prove to be impractical for resource-constrained startups.

Requirements for such significant investment of time and resources can be too daunting for business leaders and their employees within startup firms. Therefore, startups often design cost-optimized, timeline-reduced, and simple-structured employee onboarding programs to

make the best use of available resources (Mazzei et al., 2023). Moreover, startup firms often hire a small team where each employee is expected to undertake several roles and contribute across different functions of services. In other words, existing employees may have limited time available to contribute to onboarding newcomers, especially when their assigned daily tasks cannot be delayed. As a result, newcomers may receive minimal formal training and be expected to learn through hands-on experience and on-the-job training (Gregory et al., 2020). Newcomers may find themselves struggling to adapt and learn to acquire new skills necessary to succeed in their new roles without the structured guidance that is often available in traditional onboarding of large organizations.

Likewise, formal onboarding practices that are based on stability and predictability may overlook the need for newcomers to quickly understand and navigate the risks associated with the startup's business model and market dynamics. This might particularly be the case in startup firms that carry higher levels of risk and operate in agile project models (Sońta-Drączkowska & Mrożewski, 2020). In such cases, newcomers may need to adapt to the frequent changes and unexpected challenges without a structured onboarding program to guide them.

Second, startup firms, by their nature, are embedded in environments that require agility and adaptability. Such requirements entail a different approach to newcomer socialization, one that goes beyond formal onboarding to include more flexible, dynamic learning and integration strategies (Araújo et al., 2021). For instance, mentoring and coaching become invaluable in startups, providing newcomers with personalized guidance and support that can adapt to the rapidly changing needs of the organization (Suvalova et al., 2021). As such, newcomers in startup firms may expect such practices to help clarifying roles and expectations but also in fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability.

In addition, newcomers' cognitive and sensemaking process requires networking within the startup firms' ecosystem (Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2012). In that case, newcomers need to proactively build a robust network of connections to navigate the complex and uncertain environments in startup firms. This involves effectively interact with various stakeholders, such as mentors, advisors, partners, investors, and customers, which can significantly enhance their understanding of the startup culture and contribute to their effective integration into the new organization (O'Brien et al., 2020).

Moreover, studies have highlighted the importance of digital platforms and social media in facilitating newcomer integration in startup firms (Cai et al., 2021). Social media platforms can expose newcomers to a lot of information and resources, enabling them to quickly get

used to their new roles and the organizational culture within new employers. By engaging in such platforms, newcomers can obtain timely feedback and insights, thereby making sense of their new environment and contribute more effectively to the employers' mission.

However, startup firms need their limited number of employees to frequently perform different tasks beyond their assigned roles. This is problematic, as the initial onboarding practices often focus narrowly on specific job responsibilities, thus unable to prepare newcomers for the diversity of tasks they may encounter. For instance, new software engineers in a startup firm may take the onboarding practices designed for system processing, yet later required to undertake other tasks such as product design, customer support, and marketing efforts. While these might be normal for startup firms' operations, such diverse and multi-tasking requirements may can lead to distractions and affect newcomers' productivity and performance (Klonek et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2017), thereby causing frustrations.

Third, formal onboarding practices that are based on stability and predictability may overlook the need for newcomers to quickly understand and navigate the risks associated with the startup's business model and market dynamics. This might particularly be the case in startup firms that carry higher levels of risk and operate in agile project models (Sońta-Drączkowska & Mrożewski, 2020). In such cases, newcomers may need to adapt to the frequent changes and unexpected challenges without a structured onboarding program to guide them.

Fourthly, startup firms often encourage an entrepreneurial culture featured with innovation, experimentation, and autonomy (El Hanchi & Kerzazi, 2020; Koning et al., 2022). Within such an organizational culture, newcomers are often encouraged to take initiatives, think out of intuition, and challenge established practices. As such, such kind of unique organizational culture may clash with the formal onboarding practices that prioritize conformity and adherence to established procedures (Sweet et al., 2023).

Given the above considerations, newcomers in startup firms have limited information about how to effectively accomplish the priorities and objectives from formal onboarding practices, so they may turn to their colleagues, in an informal manner. Therefore, the cognitive and sensemaking theory suits the startup context, where newcomers obtain critical knowledge and feedback from colleagues through informal measures. Moreover, newcomers may develop sensemaking by seeking essential information and skills from organizational insiders, who serve as valuable sources of knowledge and feedback (Nifadkar, 2020). The literature has explained how, given the aforementioned constraints, startups tend to encourage more informal onboarding processes where newcomers are integrated into teams through day-

to-day activities (Field & Coetzer, 2011).

Informal interactions with organizational insiders may provide newcomers in startup firms with critical insights into the organization's culture, norms, and tacit knowledge that may not be explicitly documented (R. F. Korte, 2009). Such informal interactions can help newcomers to navigate the complexities embedded in startup firms, identify task priorities, and align their efforts with employers' organizational goals. However, newcomers are expected to learn through hands-on experiences, where organizational insiders can be effective in teaching the skills necessary for successfully undertaking their roles in a startup environment. In doing so, newcomers are able to quickly become involve in the different types of projects and start contributing to the new organizations' goals.

Despite the above relevance, the cognitive and sensemaking theory presents limitations in explaining newcomers' organizational socialization, especially in startup firms. One limitation lies in the assumption about newcomers' proactive information seeking. Indeed, despite the valuable information through informal interactions, newcomers may not always proactively seek the requisite information for their new roles in startup firms.

Studies have warned that insufficient guidance from organizational insiders can make newcomers struggle to adapt to the new environment (Chong et al., 2021). Indeed, without organizational insiders' clear explanations of their expectations and timely support, newcomers may find it challenging to understand their role, the company culture, and the specific skills they need to develop. As a consequence, many newcomers may develop feelings of overwhelm and frustration, which further lead to reduced productivity and job satisfaction. This study follows previous studies to recognize the various factors such as individual personality traits, social dynamics within startup firms, and time constraints (Bauer et al., 2007; Vandenberghe et al., 2021; Z. Zhang et al., 2021) that may influence whether and how newcomers engage in sensemaking activities to achieve organizational socialization.

Another limitation of the cognitive and sensemaking theory is that it may not fully explain the potential biases and limitations of informal information sources. In startup firms, the decision-making processes are often decentralized, so newcomers may find that informally acquired information can influence them (Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993; Moser et al., 2017). However, this can also create challenges if newcomers are unable to navigate the informal networks and power dynamics within the organization effectively. While organizational insiders can provide valuable insights based on their own experiences, their suggestions and feedback can be subjective and influenced by personal biases or incomplete information (Feldman, 1994; N. Li et al., 2011; Louis, 1980).

As such, the informally obtained knowledge and feedback may not always lead to positive adjustment and organizational socialization outcomes for newcomers. For instance, some colleagues may not receive systematic training in the new equipment, and they may impart inefficient and even harmful instructions to newcomers, who may fall victims to penalties and injuries (Kwan et al., 2021; W. Lin et al., 2022).

Another issue with informally obtained knowledge is that the practices and behaviors that are passed down from organizational insiders to newcomers may not always be constructive. In some cases, some colleagues, based on the abusive practices that they receive when they were newcomers, pass the abusive practices to newcomers, who may develop negative emotions and attitudes towards the organization, thereby expediting the newcomers' turnover intentions (Jiang et al., 2021).

When newcomers are exposed to such negative behaviors, it can lead to the development of negative emotions and attitudes towards the organization. This, in turn, can expedite the newcomers' turnover intentions, as they may feel undervalued, unsupported, or stressed by the abusive environment (J. Yang et al., 2019). The impact of such an environment is not limited to newcomers; it can also affect the overall organizational culture and lead to a broader pattern of unethical behavior and reduced job satisfaction among all employees. As a result, newcomers may need to critically evaluate the information they receive and evaluate multiple sources to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the startup firms.

Moreover, cognitive and sensemaking theory may not fully address the challenges associated with the overload of information acquired through informal channels. With limited formal sources of information available, newcomers may be exposed to a large amount of information from various sources, some of which may even conflict (Renzini et al., 2024). Indeed, in the context of startup firms, where formal organizational structures for key messages are often missing and relevant information is often transferred through informal channels, newcomers can be fed with an arrange unprocessed and sometimes conflicting information.

Not all newcomers have the ability to develop effective interpretation of ambiguous events and construct plausible relations to address the problems, i.e., information overload. As such, newcomers with limited cognitive capacity can feel overwhelmed when facing information overload. This can lead to confusion that prevents newcomers from effectively sifting various sources of information to prioritize their roles and objectives. As such, newcomers may find it difficult to develop relevant and useful insights.

In conclusion, while cognitive and sensemaking theory can shed important insights into how newcomers in startup firms make sense of the new work environment through informal interactions, it still bears some limitations that restrain its ability to explain newcomers' individual factors and some immediate situational factors embedded in the organizational context where their sensemaking occurs. Therefore, it is worth investigating the mechanisms under which newcomers can obtain the right knowledge necessary to fulfil their new roles.

2.2.2 Uncertainty reduction theory

The uncertainty reduction theory has been adopted to explain socialization processes (Takeuchi et al., 2021; Wien, 1997). The uncertainty reduction theory, developed by Berger and Calabrese (1975), has been adopted to explain socialization processes (Berger, 1986; Vusparatih, 2019; Wiener et al., 2023), including organizational socialization.

According to Berger and Calabrese (1975), the uncertainty reduction theory provides as a valuable framework in interpreting how individuals navigate social interactions, particularly during the process of socialisation (Kramer, 1999). The underlying assumption of this theory is that uncertainty is an indispensable aspect of human interaction, with individuals developing a variety of tactics to minimize uncertainty and maximize the predictability in their social environments (Sunnafrank, 1986).

During a newcomer's socialisation, he or she will acquire and internalise the norms, values, and expectations of a newly joined organization. When newcomers just join the new social settings within the organization, they could notice the various sources of uncertainty about their roles, anticipations, and the activities of others. Studies have shown that such uncertainty is often associated with discomfort and anxiety (T. B. Harris et al., 2014).

To cope with this uncertainty, individual can engage various information seeking activities to collect information about their new environment. For instance, newcomers may proactively join informal talks with organizational insiders in various social events, asking questions about the written and unwritten rules within the organization. Moreover, newcomers may resort to formal channels, requesting formal documents such as employee handbooks, company regulations, and past meeting records to develop understanding of the organizational-level and their job-level details. Such information-seeking activities can enable newcomers to reduce uncertainty, thus helping with their integration into the organization.

Moreover, individuals may also employ strategies such as self-disclosure, wherein they reveal information about themselves to others, thereby facilitating the development of mutual

understanding and trust. In the organisational context, this could involve sharing personal interests, skills, and experiences with colleagues during informal conversations or team-building activities.

Additionally, the uncertainty reduction theory highlights the role of communication in reducing uncertainty and facilitating socialisation processes. Effective communication channels, such as formal training programmes, mentorship schemes, and social gatherings, provide opportunities for individuals to interact, exchange information, and establish relationships, thereby mitigating uncertainty and enhancing social integration within the organisation.

Furthermore, the application of uncertainty reduction theory in organizational socialization has been supported by empirical research. Studies have shown that individuals who engage in proactive information seeking, and self-disclosure tend to experience faster and smoother socialisation processes, leading to higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes.

Within new organizations, newcomers may adopt strategies such as sharing personal interests, skills, and experiences with colleagues during informal conversations or team-building activities. Studies have suggested that such strategies play an important role in reducing uncertainty between individuals by providing insights into personal characteristics, values, and intentions (Myers & Johnson, 2004). According to Jiang et al. (2021), such strategies can create a sense of openness and authenticity with organizational insiders, leading to increased trust and rapport among organizational members.

According to uncertainty reduction theory, the high degree of uncertainty may drive newcomers to improve the predictability during their association with peers in the new organization (Gudykunst, 1985; H. Wang et al., 2022). This theory suggests that individuals who experience high degrees of uncertainty are likely to reduce discomfort by improving predictability during their interactions with members of the new environments such as new employers. This concept was initially introduced by Gudykunst (1985), later further explored in the organizational socialization studies (Frieder, 2018; Gudykunst, 1985).

Indeed, uncertainty about the behaviors, attitudes, or intentions of important others may drive individuals to reduce this uncertainty by gathering information and engaging in communication (Kramer, 1999). Such a motivation to reduce uncertainty is a fundamental facet of newcomers' interpersonal relationships in a new employer.

In other words, uncertainty reduction theory highlights the significance of communication in managing uncertainty and improving interpersonal understanding. As a result, this theory

aligns well with the core assumption of newcomers' organizational socialization, which considers newcomers' socialization as a process where they not only seek information about the explicit rules and procedures but also learn about the implicit norms and cultural dynamics of the organization (A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2018). In doing so, newcomers can successfully adjust to the norms, values, and expectations of their new workplace.

The literature has documented the various sources of uncertainty that newcomers experience due to the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of the operational environment within startup firms.

From a market perspective, startup firms run in highly competitive markets where consumer preferences, demand, and industry trends are constantly changing (Sommer et al., 2009). For instance, a startup firm that provide mobile phone app development services will face various uncertainties about user preferences as new technologies keep shifting and disrupting existing market. Newcomers may struggle to anticipate market shifts, leading to uncertainty about the viability of products or services. For example, a startup developing a new mobile app may face uncertainty about changing user preferences or emerging technologies.

Similarly, macro-environment turbulences such as pandemics, economic downturns, or geopolitical events can introduce sudden and unpredictable changes that exacerbate uncertainty for newcomers in startups. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented uncertainty about disrupted supply chains, shifted consumer preferences (e.g., increased demand for health and hygiene products & online shopping), and remote working mode (Das et al., 2023). As a result, startup firms' abilities to acquire raw materials and deliver products, maintain online presence while keeping productivity and fostering team cohesion are seriously challenged (Schutte & Asatiani, 2023).

Those challenges are passed on to newcomers. Indeed, the shift to distance working mode means reduced opportunities for of face-to-face interaction, which may hamper their ability to form connections with organizational insiders and understand the implicit cues in the new work environment (Schutte & Asatiani, 2023). Remote working, combined with requirements to efficiently adapt to new work practices (e.g., learning digital tolls & remote service procedures), may press more serious challenges for newcomers who are used to the traditional pattern of working with colleagues in person and are unfamiliar with virtual collaborations (C. P. Scott et al., 2022). Likewise, startup firms that rely on cutting-edge technologies or innovative solutions to achieve competitive advantage may expect employees to timely upgrade knowledge and proficiency in using new technologies. This can be daunting for

newcomers, especially if they lack prior experience or expertise.

Moreover, many startup firms provide products or services in industries that are subject to complex and evolving regulatory environments, where regulatory or compliance changes contradict with those firms' strategic and operational processes required to achieve innovation, economy of scale, and funding (Bromberg et al., 2017; Doblinger et al., 2019). For instance, startup firms in the healthcare sector may face stringent regulations that prevent them from accessing patient data or higher requirements to obtain medical device certification, and telehealth services.

Again, those requirements can be passed down to newcomers, who need to understanding compliance requirements, industry standards, and the potential legal implications of their work (Kaggwa et al., 2023). The complexity of industrial regulations means that newcomers often are challenged with a steep learning curve, requiring significant amount of time for learning and efforts. The importance of regulatory compliance suggests that newcomers are also under pressure to prevent mistakes that could lead to legal issues and penalties for the new employer. Moreover, the requirement of going through extensive compliance training also suggests that newcomers need to take time to fully engage with their primary job responsibilities (Puhakainen & Siponen, 2010).

Additionally, startups are often characterized with financial instability due to inconsistent revenue and precarious funding sources (Slávik, 2019). Such financial instability has further implications for newcomers, who may feel uncertain about their compensations, such as salaries and bonuses (Aran, 2019), with some even worrying about their job security. The uncertainty embedded in startup firm's financial situations may also indicate fewer opportunities for paid training, assigned guidance, and promotions, which are further translated to reduced opportunities for professional development and career advancement (Aran, 2019). Eventually, financial instability and the subsequent organizational culture could result in increased stress and reduced job satisfaction, affecting the morale and wellbeing of newcomers.

The aforementioned sources of uncertainty are typically attributed to the limited resources within startup firms, forcing them to prioritize competing demands for time, money, and manpower (Tomy & Pardede, 2018). Due to these priorities, newcomers may face within a startup environment might encounter ambiguity regarding the allocation of resources, the underlying reasoning guiding resource allocation decisions, and the potential ramifications for their individual projects or duties.

As a result, newcomers in startup firms have to navigating ambiguous roles that lack clear

boundaries or job descriptions (A. M. Saks et al., 2007). For example, a software engineer joining a startup firm may be expected to apply their coding skills into the processes such as product design and customer support. This may lead to ambiguities that can create uncertainty about their responsibilities and expectations, driving newcomers to seek ways to reduce uncertainty.

As mentioned above, newcomers have to frequently adapt to the shifting business priorities within startup firms due to changes in market opportunities (Picken, 2017). Newcomers may not always be ready to keep pace with those priority shifts, feeling uncertain about how to prioritize their efforts. As a result, a new marketing associate within a startup printing firm may need to rapidly switch strategies as the company's target market evolves from local businesses to local hospitals that bear different printing requirements. This uncertainty can push newcomers to seek information to better understand the company's priorities and direction.

In addition to role ambiguities, newcomers may feel uncertainty when navigating the team, interpersonal dynamics, and communication channels within startup firms. Indeed, start-up firms often operate in teams that consist of small, close-knit groups working under intense pressure to achieve ambitious goals (Muñoz-Bullon et al., 2015). The uncertainty embedded in those teams could have implications on the collaboration, trust, and morale (Walker et al., 2017). For instance, newcomers may hesitate to express their thoughts on a specific project, as they are uncertain whether their ideas will be interpreted by the senior organizational insiders and whether they will appreciate his or her contribution.

Another source of uncertainty in newcomers' social interactions with organizational insiders could be leadership uncertainty (Zaech & Baldegger, 2017). Leadership uncertainty can be understood as the insufficient clarity and stability in leadership roles; it is especially prevalent in dynamic environments such as startup firms where the founders and key executives often shoulder multiple responsibilities (Zuzul & Tripsas, 2020). As a result, newcomers may find it difficult to understand whether and decisions are made, and who holds authority within the organization (Virk, 2022).

When following those decisions, newcomers may have misgivings that doing so could lead to potential conflicts with organizational insiders. Also, uncertainty from leadership perspective may weaken the direction and alignment among team members, especially newcomers, thus hampering their motivation and commitment to the business objectives of startup firms (Virk, 2022). For instance, a newcomer of a startup firm managed by several founders and managers may find it challenging to understand the power dynamics among

those leaders, thus unable to understand the decision-making process. This uncertainty about leadership roles could lead newcomers to be hesitant when taking actions, delaying work progress, and even cause misunderstandings with other organizational insiders.

Furthermore, startup firms often have unique organizational cultures that are featured with innovation, risk-taking, and a flat structure (S. Lee, 2022). When trying to blend into new organizational culture, newcomers may struggle to interpret and comply with startup firm's values and practices due to ambiguities in cultural norms, fearing whether their behaviors could cause conflicts with organizational insiders (Sommer et al., 2009).

Such fears and misgivings could also hamper newcomers' proactive social integration. Indeed, newcomers may find it hard to adjust themselves to fit in the informal work environments, thus unable to find the optimum collaborative mode preferred by organizational insiders. This may cause a feeling of isolation among newcomers, thus further hampering teamwork. Eventually, the felt uncertainty about startup firms' cultural expectations can drive newcomers to feel disconnected, thus reducing their motivation and commitment (Sommer et al., 2009).

Organizations may help newcomers reduce uncertainty through training programs and onboarding practices. These include 1) clarifying newcomers' roles and responsibilities, setting clear expectations from the induction to help newcomers feel more confident and capable in their roles, reducing uncertainty (K. Becker & Bish, 2021), 2) signposting newcomers to the relevant information about the companies' organizational goals, strategies, and processes (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). By imparting relevant knowledge, employers can help newcomers make informed investments of time and efforts and navigate uncertainties, and 3) fostering opportunities for newcomers to connect with organizational insiders and helping them build social networks within the organization to further reducing uncertainty (Patel & Mohanty, 2023).

Another implication of uncertainty reduction theory is that onboarding practices should reduce the chances of surprises that newcomers may experience at work by providing easy accesses to the relevant information, thereby generating positive attitudes and socialization outcomes for newcomers (D. G. Allen, 2006; Cooper-Thomas et al., 2020). According to Cooper-Thomas et al. (2020), organizations can provide easy access to relevant information through onboarding programs to enhance newcomers' positive attitudes and socialization outcomes. This is achieved by organizations' proactive measures that ensure that newcomers have access to essential information about their roles, responsibilities, and the organizational culture. In doing so, organizations can help reduce uncertainties and improve a sense of

belonging and confidence among newcomers.

While uncertainty reduction theory allows researchers to develop valuable insights into how individuals manage uncertainty in new social situations, Gudykunst (1985) remind that this theory may oversimplify the complexities of human interaction and decision-making processes. Indeed, individual behaviors and motivations are influenced by several factors beyond uncertainty, such as orientations, past experiences, and situational context (Knobloch & Satterlee, 2015; Niemivirta, 2002).

Moreover, the underlying assumption that decreased uncertainty can always lead to improved predictability and confidence may not be supported in all situations. The literature has documented situations where uncertainty cannot be practically reduced by individual efforts (Biel & Gärling, 1995). For instance, in certain complex markets such as financial markets, uncertainty is resulting from a wide array of variables and unpredictable interactions. It is unrealistic for newcomers working in the relevant startup firms in this sector to remove all uncertainty. Instead, newcomers are expected to adapt to the changing conditions (Hogg, 2000).

As mentioned above, startup firms relying on emerging technologies may also face uncertainty, since disruptive innovation has been a key theme in the market. Additionally, Jalonen (2012) remind that uncertainty is not always negative. Some level of uncertainty can foster creativity, innovation, and exploration, prompting individuals to question existing norms and seek new solutions to problems.

Furthermore, uncertainty reduction may become less effective in maintaining newcomers' work engagement, i.e., the positive and satisfying mentality towards work that is featured with vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002); that is because newcomers' positive attitudes and engagement may decline after their entry (Lawler et al., 1975; A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2018; Wong et al., 2022).

The study by Schaufeli et al. (2002) stressed the importance role that work engagement plays in maintaining a positive and satisfying mentality towards work; more importantly, it indicates that uncertainty reduction may not always lead to sustained work engagement among newcomers. This finding concurs with the argument of Lawler et al. (1975) that newcomers' positive attitudes and engagement at work can reduce after entering an organization, indicating a potential decline in work engagement over time.

Later, A. M. Saks and Gruman (2018) further supports the notion that newcomers' positive attitudes and engagement may decline after their entry into an organization. These studies all point to the view that the efforts to reduce uncertainty may not always effectively

maintain work engagement among newcomers.

In a startup firm, newcomers may try to reduce uncertainty through interactions with the founders and other colleagues, i.e., organizational insiders. In doing so, newcomers could obtain the background information that enables them to anticipate and interpret the incidents that may surprise them at work. The research by Alan M Saks and Ashforth (1997) elaborated on the significance of organizational insiders in assisting newcomers in reducing uncertainty during the latter's organizational socialization. Specifically, by engaging with these insiders, newcomers can obtain insights into the organizational culture, norms, and expectations, which collectively allow them to better prepare for potential surprises and challenges they may encounter in their roles within the startup firms.

The research by Morrison (2002) examined the role of newcomers' information seeking and the subsequent influences on their organizational socialization process. The study highlights the importance role of proactive information seeking and the role of organizational insiders in providing essential information. It also verified that engagement with organizational insiders enables newcomers to address uncertainties, anticipate challenges, and effectively integrate into the startup culture.

In addition to engagement with organizational insiders, Feldman and Brett (1983) stressed how organizations' socialization practices, such as interactions with organizational insiders, can positively influence newcomers' abilities to reduce uncertainty. By taking advantage of these interactions, newcomers can access critical information that aids in their understanding of the startup's dynamics and expectations.

Despite its relevance, the uncertainty reduction theory alone may not be able to explain newcomers' uncertain reduction within startup firms, as its effectiveness can be challenges by several factors. First, the essential information required for uncertainty reduction may not always be readily available, even to organizational insiders (Setiawati et al., 2022). The study by Setiawati et al. (2022) posits that the essential information required to reduce uncertainties embedded in the new organizational environment may not always be readily available, even to organizational insiders. These authors suggest that rapid changes in the business environment can make it challenging for startups to provide comprehensive and up-to-date information to newcomers, making the uncertainty reduction practices hard to implement.

Second, newcomers' positive attitudes and engagement may decline over time, especially after initial training and support from employers (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Bauer & Erdogan, 2014). Ashforth and Saks (1996) elaborated on how newcomers' desirable work attitudes and engagement may reduce as the initial training and support provided by organizations

discontinue after the induction programs. In other words, that uncertainty reduction efforts by startup firms may not be enough to maintain newcomers' long-term information seeking efforts. Moreover, uncertainties beyond the onboarding stage can further affect newcomers' motivation and engagement, indicating continuous challenges that prevent startups from sustaining newcomers' long-term adjustment.

Berger and Calabrese (1975) explained how people reduce doubts and uncertainties when meeting someone new through interactive tactics such as asking questions, observing nonverbal cues, and offering personal information. By integrating this theory to the context of startups, insights can be better gained into how newcomers engage with organizational insiders to gather information and reduce uncertainties during their socialization process.

As a result, startup firms' uncertainty reduction efforts may not be enough in maintaining newcomers' long-term information seeking efforts. These limitations suggest that more research is needed to explore the onboarding practices that can effectively support newcomers' adjustment and socialization in startup firms.

2.2.3 Socialization resource theory

Drawing on the uncertainty reduction theory, the socialization resource theory is further proposed, arguing that resources are fundamental for newcomers to adapt and manage job-related demands and maintain work engagement (A. B. Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Çop et al., 2021; Laguna & Razmus, 2019). According to Hobfoll (2002), individuals are often motivated to obtain and conserve critical resources, i.e., the materials, objectives, status, or conditions that can bring them benefits (B. Meyer et al., 2021). Drawing on the socialization resource theory, it is argued that newcomers require essential resources to effectively navigate job-related demands and foster engagement (A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2018; M. Wang et al., 2015).

According to Hobfoll (2002), individuals are often motivated to obtain and conserve critical resources, i.e., the materials, objectives, status, or conditions that can bring them benefits (B. Meyer et al., 2021). The research of Hobfoll (2002) demonstrated how employees are motivated to acquire and conserve critical resources that can bring them benefits, and identified those resources, including materials, objectives, status, or conditions are beneficial to their well-being and success. B. Meyer et al. (2021) further elaborated on the significance of those resources for newcomers to effectively manage job-related demands.

Drawing on the socialization resource theory, it is argued that newcomers require

essential resources to effectively navigate job-related demands and foster engagement (A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2018; M. Wang et al., 2015). In particular, those resources are critical in supporting newcomers' adjustment processes and facilitating their integration into the organizational culture.

The literature has documented the critical resources that newcomers need to achieve adjustment and socialization. The first type of resource includes the critical job-related information about their job roles and responsibilities and organizational goals (Cai et al., 2021). For example, a new marketing specialist in a startup company may need access to the essential data on market research, competitor analysis, and product details to formulate effective marketing strategies and activities.

Cai et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of job-related information as an important resource for newcomers to adjust to their new roles within organizations. Such information includes the specific details about role requirements, responsibilities, as well as their relationship with organizational goals; it is essential for newcomers to effectively navigate their positions and contribute to the new employer. This study aligns with the above discussion regarding newcomers' information seeking and socialization within organizations.

The verified influence of job-related information suggests that startup firms should the provide newcomers with the necessary knowledge to understand their roles and responsibilities. For instance, a new marketing specialist may need access to critical market data and product details to develop informed marketing activities effectively. As such, Cai et al. (2021)'s research sheds light on how startup firms can support newcomers in acquiring the foundational knowledge needed to fulfill in their roles, thereby fostering their integration, enhancing job performance, and promoting engagement.

In this case, such information becomes key resources that can help the newcomers to understand the intricacies of the startup firm's products and market positions and thus make contributions to the organization. Therefore, startup firms can ensure that newcomers are equipped with the necessary resources to contribute to the overall growth of the organization.

The second type of resource includes the skill development workshops that enable newcomers to develop and enhance job-related skills. For example, sales managers in startup firms can involve new sales specialists in client meetings, product demonstrations, and sales pitches to help improve their communication and negotiation skills. According to the socialization resource theory, such on-site learning opportunities are valuable resources that can contribute to newcomers' socialization (Nolan et al., 2023).

The research by Nolan et al. (2023) emphasizes the importance of on-site learning

opportunities for newcomers. Those opportunities, including new skill development workshops can facilitate newcomers' socialization within organizations. Indeed, by involving newcomers in practical situations such as customer meetings and product promotions, organizations can aid newcomers to adapt to job-related demands.

The above study concurs to the newcomer socialization literature by highlighting the role of experiential learning in fostering newcomers' integration and engagement within organizational contexts. By providing hands-on opportunities for skill development, startup firms can support newcomers to acquire the necessary competencies to excel in their roles effectively. By including newcomers in real-world scenarios, organizations can accelerate the learning speed of newcomers and facilitate their transition into the new work environment.

The third type of resource includes the essential tools and technologies provided to newcomers to facilitate newcomers to perform their roles effectively (A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2012). For instance, a new graphic designer may need licensed design software, creative digital devices, and collaboration platforms to create visually appealing marketing videos and leaflets to promote a startup's branding. A. M. Saks and Gruman (2012) emphasize the significance of offering essential tools and technologies to newcomers to enhance their performance in the workplace. By providing new employees with the necessary resources like software, devices, and platforms, organizations can support them in carrying out their tasks effectively. This approach not only aids in job performance but also contributes to the overall success of the organization by ensuring that newcomers have what they need to fulfill their roles efficiently.

When their resources are deprived or lost, employees may experience negative consequences that harm their well-bring (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Following this assumption, newcomers need to seek and obtain the critical resources that allow them to fulfil their roles and engage with their new positions in the startup firms. In other words, newcomers need the necessary job-related resources, i.e., the various physical, psychological, social, and organizational functions related to a job that can help newcomers to meet the job-related demands.

Job-related resources can be task-related and social-related (Hu et al., 2016; Wolter et al., 2019), with the former reflecting the work context, while the latter reflecting the interpersonal aspects. Job related resources can come from organizations (e.g., AMO-enhancing practices), and social interactions with supervisors and colleagues (Meyers et al., 2020). Task-related resources provide newcomers with the necessary tools and information to navigate their job responsibilities effectively, while social-related resources facilitate interpersonal interactions

and relationship-building within the organizational context.

Hu et al. (2016) and Wolter et al. (2019) highlight the differences between task-related and social-related job resources, while stressing the importance of both types of resources in supporting newcomers' adjustment to organizations. In line with the resource-based logic, newcomers' organizational socialization process can be understood as a course where organizations impart newcomers with the relevant resources, with socialization as a facilitator of resource development Hobfoll (2002).

Meyers et al. (2020) argue that job-related resources can come from organizations, such as practices that enhance the AMO, as well as from social interactions with organizational insiders. These resources can provide newcomers with the necessary support and guidance to integrate successfully into the organizational environment.

Hobfoll (2002) considers organizational socialization as a process where organizations impart relevant resources to newcomers. In this case, socialization is considered as a facilitator of resource development, thereby highlighting organizations' roles in providing the tools, knowledge, and support needed for effective adjustment.

Additionally, onboarding practices serve as a stimulus for newcomers' positive adjustment, thereby generating more desirable resources for the organization. While the socialization resource theory provides explanations for onboarding practices, it also reminds that excessive job-related demands may exhaust newcomers' job-related resources, thereby harming their work engagement and performance.

However, despite the importance of resources in facilitating newcomers' adaptation and engagement in startup firms, the socialization resource theory still presents several limitations in explaining the socialization process of newcomers in startup firms. First, resources such as customer information, capable mentors and valuable tools are often limited in startup firms (Paradkar et al., 2015), so not all employees can have even access to them. For example, the critical information about market demands for specific products are often closely controlled by important stakeholders such as senior managers. As such, newcomers may not be able to easily obtain the insights in obtaining the necessary resources to perform their roles effectively.

Indeed, organizational insiders may not always be willing to share resources with newcomers, especially if they perceive those resources as essential for them to preserve their competitive advantages within startup firms (Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2012). Such unwillingness to share resources can prevent newcomers from adapting and fulfilling in their roles. Moreover, even if newcomers obtain certain resources as an exchange with those organizational insiders,

they may become overly dependent on these resources (Hanegraaff et al., 2020). Such dependence could make newcomers vulnerable to disruptions or changes in the organizational environment. For example, if a newcomer overly relies on a specific senior colleague who quits the startup firm, he may struggle to adapt and perform effectively in the role without adequate support or guidance.

The above-mentioned limitations about socialization resource theory suggest that further studies are required to explore how newcomers navigate resource-seeking behaviors in startup firms to achieve socialization.

2.2.4 Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory is another theoretical perspective that organizational socialization researchers adopt to explain how organizations promote employees' psychological attachment and continuous commitment to their roles (Nishanthi & Kailasapathy, 2017). According to this theory, actors develop different emotions and feelings when interacting with other actors; these emotions and feelings come from operational elements of exchange and are used by actors to develop various social sets, such as relations, groups, and networks (Bettis-Outland et al., 2020).

For instance, Nishanthi and Kailasapathy (2017) drew on the social exchange theory to interpret how organizations enhance employees' psychological attachment and commitment to their roles. Bettis-Outland et al. (2020) highlighted the role of social exchange in shaping social interactions within organizations, thus demonstrating how organizational members engage in exchanges that generate emotions and feelings, ultimately contributing to the formation of social connections such as relationships, groups, and networks.

As a result, social exchange theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relationships within organizations. This framework highlights importance of reciprocity and the exchange of valuable resources among individuals. It allows researchers to explore how these exchanges influence employees' attitudes, behaviors, and performance, ultimately affecting organizational outcomes.

Moreover, social change involves reciprocal changes of resources guided by specific social norms. Newcomers' perception of trust and fairness during these social interactions with colleagues could affect their emotions and feelings. Social exchange experience may lead to desirable or undesirable emotions that further influence actors' expectations of the next exchange (Portocarrero, 2019). For instance, Portocarrero (2019) highlighted how

individuals' social exchange experiences can elicit their desirable or undesirable emotions, thus influencing their expectations for future interactions. Employees' perceived trust and fairness during these exchanges with colleagues may contribute to their emotions and feelings. Drawing on the social exchange theory (Frieder, 2018; Gouldner, 1960), Gouldner (1960), Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) and Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001) further proposed the leader-member exchange theory, positing that leaders develop idiosyncratic exchange-based relationships with employees.

As such, social exchange theory in organizational settings highlights the role of reciprocity, trust, and fairness in shaping the relationships between newcomers and organizational insiders as well as each other's attitudes. By understanding the principles of social exchange, organizations can foster positive interactions, enhance employee commitment, and improve overall organizational performance. In short, previous studies have provided ample evidence regarding how social exchange influences workplace dynamics.

Newcomers' interactions with supervisors and colleagues play a critical role in their adjustment and performance (M. Wang et al., 2015). The social exchange theory can explain the various exchanges that shape newcomers' roles, expectations, and relationships within the organization. First, the quality of social exchange (e.g., role negotiation, responsibility and expectation clarifications) between newcomers and their supervisors can significantly affect the former's adjustment and socialization results (J. Liu et al., 2021).

As such, a newcomer's role is designed and modified through a range of exchanges between an organizational insider and the newcomer. On the one hand, the leader may provide varied responsibilities and benefits to the newcomer, expecting the newcomer to make increasing contribution and sustained engagement to the organization. On the other hand, newcomers need to negotiate with leaders and members to clarity their roles (Scandura et al., 1986).

The quality of leader-member exchange may determine whether the newcomers and their leaders will form high-quality relationships, with each actor making reciprocal and autonomous efforts, or low-quality exchange, with each actor simply meeting contractual requirements (Hofmans et al., 2019). For instance, the way that a newcomer perceives his or her supervisor's contribution to his or her benefits and wellbeing could be associated with his subsequent expectations, attitudes, and behaviors towards the organization. While the leader-member exchange theory may help unravel the relationship dynamics from both the leader and the newcomer's perspectives (i.e., vertical exchange), it fails to involve other organizational members such as the newcomers' peers (i.e., horizontal exchange).

In a high-quality social exchange, the newcomer may develop mutual trust, support, and communication with the supervisor. This positive relationship can further contribute a sense of belonging and encourages newcomer to invest more effort and engagement in their work (Abdullah et al., 2023). Research indicates in a positive relationship, employees respond positively to treatment received from the organization; in other words, organizations can influence employee attitudes, behavior, and performance by nurturing strong relationships between employees and the organization (Carter, 2010).

Conversely, a low-quality social exchange involves limited support or unclear expectations, leading to dissatisfaction, disengagement, and underperformance among newcomers (Carter, 2010). In particular, newcomers receiving limited organizational support may feel less obligated to reciprocate positively towards the employer, with lower commitment. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of social exchange in organizations is crucial for fostering positive workplace relationships and enhancing employee engagement.

In addition, newcomers also need to interact with other colleagues in the startup firms. Such exchange with non-managers is also important for newcomers to establish social connections, seek advice, and gain support in navigating the startup environment (J. Liu et al., 2021). With positive social exchanges with peers, enhance newcomers can form a sense of belonging and knowledge sharing, which contribute to improved job performance. In contrast, negative exchanges such as conflicts or competition with peers may prevent newcomers from successfully integrating into startup firms and negatively affect their performance.

Despite its explanatory power, the social exchange theory still has limitations when applied to newcomers' interactions in startup firms. First, most studies have primarily assumed the exchange between newcomers and senior managers (Hu et al., 2020; H. Liu et al., 2023; L. Zhang et al., 2020), thus unable to explore the dynamics in the horizontal exchanges with peers. Many startup firms operate in projects where collaboration and teamwork are essential (Gregory et al., 2022). In that sense, the quality of peer relationship between newcomers and peers can also affect their adjustment and performance.

Second, the social exchange theory provides insights into the reciprocal nature of relationships between newcomers and organizational insiders, especially given the complexities of social dynamics in startup environments (Rollag, 2004). Factors such as organizational culture, power dynamics, and informal networks can influence the quality of exchanges and shape newcomers' experiences. As a result, the social exchange theory needs to be integrated with other contextual factors to generate a deeper understanding of newcomers' adjustment and socialization results in startup firms.

In summary, the above-mentioned theoretical perspectives have related to the resource exchange and uncertainty reduction nature of newcomer socialization within startup firms, as well as the roles of leaders and newcomers. Guided by these theories, the related literature on newcomer organizational socialization in startup firms is presented.

2.3 Literature related to newcomers' organizational socialization in startup firms

2.3.1 Organization-centric stage (i.e., onboarding practices)

The topic of organizational socialization has evolved since the 1970s, with early-stage studies primarily focusing on the sociological aspects of this phenomenon(Bullis, 1993; Van Maanen, 1978; Wanous et al., 1984), as well as the stage models of socialization. These early-stage studies primarily took organizations as the unit of analysis, assuming that socialization only happened within organizations; as such, newcomers were not included in their analyses.

The seminal work of Van Maanen (1978) offers an important perspective on newcomers; organizational socialization, introducing important concept of people processing and discussing how organizations induct new members into their culture, norms, and practices. This framework was essential in interpreting how organizations systematically influence newcomers' socialization process. Wanous et al. (1984) examined the socialization process through the lens of organizational entry, highlighting the importance of realistic job previews in reducing newcomer turnover by setting accurate expectations about the job and organization. The research of Bullis (1993) work examined how the forms of communication influence newcomers' socialization process, highlighting the importance of information exchange between newcomers and the organization. However, these studies primarily focused on organizational strategies rather than the active role of newcomers in navigating their socialization.

In short, the early stage contributed to the fundamental understanding of organizational socialization by examining the sociological aspects and the stages where newcomers are integrated into organizations. However, those studies focused more on while less on the proactive role and experiences of newcomers. Such a focus failed to fully consider newcomers' participation in their own socialization process.

The middle-stage studies focusing on firms' organizational socialization tactics; in this stage, researchers, while still focused on socialization process within organizations, started to

consider the impact of newcomers in organizational socialization success. During this stage, researchers took newcomers and organizations as separate actors in socialization. This led to the conceptualization of social capital to examine the perspectives of organizational insiders and newcomers as separate cohorts.

Finally, recent studies focusing on the dynamic constructs and questions related to organizational socialization process (T. D. Allen et al., 2017; Bauer & Erdogan, 2014; Coldwell et al., 2019). This section reviews such an evolutionary process to identify the themes and theories that are related to the context of this study, i.e., newcomers' organizational socialization within startup firms.

T. D. Allen et al. (2017) conducted a literature review about the multifaceted nature of organizational socialization, recommending more research into the dynamic processes that influence how newcomers adapt to new organizational environments. It suggests that organizations should design flexible and responsive socialization practices to meet newcomers with different needs and experiences. This study also points to the need for a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of individual experiences and the evolving nature of organizational contexts. This is especially important for startup firms, where the rapid pace of change and innovation demands socialization strategies.

Bauer and Erdogan (2014) focused on the socialization tactics and strategies that facilitate effective newcomer integration. They explore how tailored socialization practices can enhance newcomers' understanding of their roles, the organizational culture, and the expectations placed upon them, thereby improving job satisfaction, commitment, and performance. This study underscores the significance of personalized and strategic socialization efforts in fostering a positive adjustment experience for newcomers. For startups, where roles can be fluid and organizational structures less formal, Bauer and Erdogan's insights highlight the importance of clear communication and support during the socialization process.

Coldwell et al. (2019) investigate the impact of technology-mediated socialization practices on newcomer adjustment. Their work examines how digital tools and platforms can be leveraged to support the socialization process, offering insights into the benefits and challenges associated with virtual onboarding and integration efforts. In the context of startup firms, which often embrace technological solutions and may operate with remote or distributed teams, Coldwell et al. (2019)'s findings are particularly relevant. Their research suggests that technology can play a crucial role in facilitating newcomer socialization, provided that it is used thoughtfully and in conjunction with traditional, interpersonal

socialization tactics.

These recent studies collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the organizational socialization process, emphasizing the need for dynamic, flexible, and context-sensitive approaches to newcomer integration. This evolving perspective is especially pertinent for startup firms, where the unique organizational environment and culture necessitate innovative and adaptive socialization strategies.

In terms of themes, early-stage studies of organizational socialization (Buchanan, 1974; Feldman, 1981; Nelson, 1987) primarily adopted sociological perspectives to examine the phenomenon within organizations (Kelley, 1992). For instance, Buchanan (1974) conducted a foundational study by drawing on a sociological aspect to interpret how individuals integrate into organizational settings. This study suggests socialization involves not only the newcomer adjustment but also their adaptation to various social roles and environments. However, this study investigated newcomer adjustment from the lens of social role transitions, rather than the unique processes where newcomers are integrated into new organizations.

Feldman (1981) further investigated how employees adapt to the requirements of new organizational roles and environments. Again, it treated newcomer adjustment as a kind of life transitions, such as moving from school to work, without insights into the specificities of organizational integration. Nelson (1987) investigated the experiences of newcomers as they transition into new = organizational contexts, stressing the importance of social support and communication in facilitating successful socialization. Kelley (1992) drew on previous studies to examine how individuals' social identities and relationships influence their adjustment to new organizational roles.

In short, research in this stage did not consider newcomer adjustment as a unique situation; rather, they compared newcomer adjustment as one of the transitional experiences (e.g., from high school to university; from school to work) in an individual's life (Ashford & Black, 1996). Ashford and Black (1996) later treated newcomer adjustment as a distinct phase for newcomers, thus indicating a shift towards a more focused examination of newcomer integration into new organizations.

In line with this logic, earlier researchers considered how organizations took measures to assimilate newcomers into their sociological environment (Buchanan, 1974; Feldman, 1981; Nelson, 1987). In other words, newcomers were assumed to be reactively influenced by organizations' socialization tactics (e.g., culture, practices, policies, goals and values) (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). For instance, researchers examined how the brainwashing and initiation tactics affect newcomer socialization.

These studies often compared newcomer adjustment to other transitional experiences to draw parallels and identify common patterns. For example, Ashford and Black (1996) examined how the challenges and adaptations required during organizational socialization mirrored those seen in other life transitions. By adopting a sociological lens, these early studies aimed to understand the social processes, structures, and dynamics that influence newcomer adjustment within organizational contexts.

However, despite providing valuable insights into the broader socialization process, these early studies had limitations. They often neglected the unique challenges and nuances of newcomer adjustment within organizational settings, treating it as a generic process rather than exploring its distinct features. Indeed, those studies often assumed socialization to be a generic process, failing to discuss the distinct features present in different organizational settings such as startup firms. For instance, the socialization experience of newcomers in a hierarchical large corporate environment may differ significantly from those in a flat startup firm. By neglecting these differences, early studies may have provided an incomplete understanding of the socialization process.

Additionally, these studies may have failed to capture the complexity and variability of newcomer experiences across different organizational contexts. Indeed, each organization bears unique set of norms, values, and practices, which can influence how newcomers navigate their socialization journey. However, early studies often adopted a general approach, thus unable to interpret the diverse array of organizational cultures and environments. This could limit the understanding of the factors that shape newcomer socialization experiences in different organizational contexts.

As research in organizational socialization progressed, studies began to recognize the importance of treating newcomer adjustment as a unique phenomenon deserving of focused attention. Subsequent studies adopted more nuanced and context-specific approaches to explore the factors influencing newcomer adjustment within organizations. By examining the role of organizational culture, social networks, leadership practices, and other contextual factors, researchers gained a deeper understanding of how newcomers navigate the challenges and opportunities presented during the process of organizational socialization.

These studies omitted the proactive responses of newcomers, assuming the success of newcomer organizational socialization solely hinged on those organizational socialization tactics. At the same time, some researchers (Ashford & Black, 1996; Schein, 1968) proposed that organizations provide not only the sociological context, but also the psychological stimuli during the process of newcomer organizational socialization.

These studies primarily examined organizations' onboarding programs; specifically, how onboarding programs affect the outcomes of newcomer organizational socialization. In that case, startup firms would be held responsible for the desirable and undesirable outcomes of newcomer organizational socialization.

The above-mentioned development constituted the classical underpinning of newcomer organizational socialization, and more importantly, the construct of newcomer onboarding practices. Early scholars such as Van Maanen and Schein (1977) proposed onboarding practices classification to examine how organizational culture can be passed on to newcomers through newcomer orientation sessions, training handbooks to speed up newcomer organizational socialization, as well as how these practices are associated with newcomers' anxiety and dissonance (Ashforth et al., 1997).

Van Maanen and Schein (1977) first explored the process of organizational socialization and proposed a categorization of onboarding practices into three distinct areas: context, content, and association. This framework helps to dissect the various aspects of how newcomers are introduced and integrated into an organization. In this case, context refers to the structural setup of the onboarding process, distinguishing between formal (e.g., training programs) and informal methods; content refers to the specific knowledge, skills, and behaviors that the organization plans to train newcomers; association concerns the social aspect of onboarding, focusing on how newcomers are introduced to and develop relationships with organizational insiders.

By examining the context, content, and association aspects of onboarding, organizations can develop comprehensive strategies to effectively integrate newcomers, as exemplified by the formal training programs discussed by Jones (1986). This approach not only facilitates the practical skills and knowledge newcomers need but also supports their social integration into the organization.

In short, the above early-age studies on organizational socialization have demonstrated some limitations. First, these studies often neglect the specific organizational context where newcomer adjustment and socialization take place (M. Wang et al., 2015). For instance, these studies often present their findings across various types of organizations, with limited attention to the unique characteristics of organizations. This may affect those studies' abilities to provide context-specific insights into the factors influencing newcomer adjustment and socialization results.

Second, early studies often assumed that newcomer adjustment as a uniform process, failing to consider individual differences in personalities, experiences, and preferences

(Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). They did not adequately explore how factors such as personality traits, power distance orientations, and prior work experiences shape newcomers' adjustment experiences within organizations.

Third, many early studies compare newcomer adjustment to other life transitions, such as transitioning from high school to university or from school to work (Klemme & Bell, 2013). While this comparative perspective could provide some interesting insights, it may have obscured the unique challenges and dynamics of newcomer adjustment within specific organizational contexts. For instance, this approach may the depth of understanding of the organizational factors influencing newcomer adjustment in startup firms.

Finally, many early studies on organizational socialization relied on qualitative methods such as interviews to explore newcomers' socialization results (Ashforth et al., 2007; R. Korte, 2010). While qualitative approaches offer rich insights into individuals' experiences, they may lack generalizability and reliability compared to quantitative methods. Additionally, the limited sample sizes in early studies may present challenges to draw generalizable conclusions about newcomer adjustment and socialization results. Those early studies are contrasted with the unique context of startup firms where projects are undertaken in small sizes, and newcomers are often isolated from each other, in the form of interns, apprentices, or probation-based employees.

Regarding the content of onboarding programs, Jones (1986) identified the training programs that followed specific orders, with specific instructions related to newcomers' roles. These programs are often routinized and are unlikely to change over time or according to the individualized needs of newcomers. The existing literature on onboarding practices, while valuable, has limitations that hinder the application in startup firms.

First, many human resource management studies have traditionally treated onboarding as a single, standardized practice focused on orientation programs or training sessions. These studies often overlook the diverse and dynamic nature of onboarding practices in startup firms, which may involve unconventional methods tailored to the unique needs and challenges of these organizations.

For instance, Klein and Weaver (2000) examined how a voluntarily attended orientation training can help enhance newcomers' levels of organizational commitment; according to these researchers, orientation programs are designed for newcomers to learn the different aspects of their duties, the relevant co-workers that they often have to work with, health and safety benefits, employment terms and conditions, as well as the history and values of the employer (Gupta et al., 2017).

Second, existing research have rarely considered the specific context of startup firms, which operate under distinct conditions characterized by rapid growth, resource constraints, and high levels of uncertainty. As a result, traditional onboarding practices designed for established organizations may not effectively address the needs of startups, which require agility, innovation, and adaptability in their approach to human resource management.

In particular, startup firms may have to customize the onboarding practices to different newcomers. In that case, the individualized onboarding practices may include different contents for different newcomers and even follow different orders. As for onboarding practices, organizations may set up role models, e.g., successful insiders, to socialize newcomers (Van Maanen & Schein, 1977). One common type of role model has been mentors that organizations assign for newcomers to learn the expected behaviors, attitudes, and performance.

Moreover, the onboarding programs may stimulate newcomers to actively pursue the new identity inside the employers. However, startup firms may not be able to provide the role models that newcomers can imitate (Schutjens et al., 2010). In particular, for newcomers that come from a different or more successful organization, startup firms may not be able to provide the qualified role models, or force the newcomers to accept the values, attitudes, or behaviors that are completely different from their former experience.

Third, some studies have explored onboarding practices beyond orientation programs, but these efforts remain limited. For instance, while Klein and Weaver (2000) examined the impact of orientation training on organizational commitment, they did not delve into the broader spectrum of onboarding practices, such as mentorship programs, peer-to-peer learning initiatives, or cultural immersion experiences, which are increasingly relevant in startup contexts.

In particular, Wiseman et al. (2022) remind that onboarding practices include multiple dimensions, and can be collective or individual, formal or informal, sequential or random, fixed or variable, and investiture or divestiture. Among these practices, Wiseman et al. (2022) chose two sets of polarized onboarding practices: formal and informal; with formal onboarding practices helping newcomers to develop specific orientations (e.g., innovation orientation and value congruence) and informal onboarding practices. These studies consider onboarding practices as equally important for firm growth while fail to consider the unique context where those practices are undertaken.

However, resource constraints may not allow firms to apply equal weight to all onboarding practices (McClean & Collins, 2019). In startup firms, entrepreneurs and core

founders have to concentrate on product development and marketing activities to ensure healthy financial performance, and thus have limited time to develop formal hiring and training programs.

Fourth, while many studies have explored the effectiveness of onboarding practices in established organizations, there is a lack of empirical evidence specifically on the role of onboarding in startup firms. This gap prevents the understanding of the best practices and strategies for onboarding in the context of startups, limiting the ability of practitioners to develop tailored approaches that meet the needs of these organizations.

In short, while existing research has contributed valuable insights into onboarding practices, particularly in traditional organizational settings, there is a clear need for further exploration and understanding of onboarding practices in startup firms. Future research should aim to address these limitations by adopting a more nuanced and context-specific approach that considers the unique dynamics, challenges, and opportunities associated with onboarding in startup environments.

2.3.2 Startup firms' onboarding practices from an AMO lens

Drawing on the early-stage literature on onboarding practices, the rest part of this section discusses onboarding practices adopted by startup firms. Startup firms seeking or experiencing growth require well trained workers, creative ideas, adequate funding, and commitment (Pratiwi et al., 2018). According to Pratiwi et al. (2018), well-trained employees can bring valuable skills and expertise to startup firms, with their creative ideas contributing to innovation. In other words, the success of a startup firm depends on a combination of human capital, innovation, financial resources, and dedication.

To achieve these, startup firms need to configure its human resource management (e.g., onboarding) practices for the optimum fit (S. Li et al., 2022). S. Li et al. (2022) elaborated on the importance of configuring human resource management practices to support the unique needs of startup firms. The study suggests that tailored onboarding practices are crucial for integrating new employees in a manner that aligns with the startup's culture, goals, and operational dynamics. The results shredded light on the important role of onboarding practices in startup firms. In particular, onboarding practices enable startup firms to inform newcomers about their roles and responsibilities and align with the employers' vision and culture.

To elaborate on those onboarding practices, researchers increasingly adopt the ability-

motivation-opportunity (AMO) logic to investigate the impact of human resource management practices (S. Li et al., 2022). According to Harney and Alkhalaf (2020), the AMO logic, based on a configurational perspective, could allow researchers to overcome the problems embedded in the aforementioned single or polarized methods and better examine how the contingent factors in human resource management practices could lead to discrepant results in examining employee performance.

The AMO logic dates back to Blumberg and Pringle (1982) who proposed the ability, willingness (i.e., motivation), and opportunity perspectives to predict an individual employees' job performance. Drawing on the interactive nature of employee performance, Blumberg and Pringle (1982) defined 1) ability as an employee's combination of cognitive (e.g., knowledge, knowhow, intelligence, and education) and physiological (e.g., age, health, endurance, stamina, and energy) that allow them to effectively undertake specific tasks; 2) motivation as an employee's motivation as an employee's combination of willingness, status, values, personality, self-image, and anxiety; and 3) opportunity as the specific forces surrounding an employee's work environment that affect his/her performance and are out of his/her control (pp. 563-565).

Drawing on Bos-Nehles et al. (2013), this study define 'ability-enhancing practices' as the formal or informal training that a startup provides to enhance a newcomer's competencies necessary to successfully undertake his or her tasks; 'motivation-enhancing practices' as the formal or informal training that a startup provides to enhance a newcomer's desire and willingness to undertake his or her tasks; and 'opportunity-enhancing practices' as the formal or informal mechanisms that a startup provides to enable a newcomer to seek necessary support and express ideas related to his or her role.

The AMO framework has traditionally been adopted to in explaining the relationship between human resource practices and organizational performance. Appelbaum et al. (2000) first formulated the AMO framework, which stresses the importance of employees' abilities, motivation, and opportunities in influencing organizational performance. This framework offers a fundamental structure for organizations to improve their HR practices by focusing on enhancing employees' skills, fostering motivation, and providing opportunities for growth and development.

The AMO framework has been frequently used to examine the impacts human resource management practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gupta et al., 2017; Munteanu, 2014). These studies draw on this framework to explore how human resource management practices contribute to organizational outcomes. Their results verified the importance of aligning HR

strategies with the principles of the AMO framework to drive organizational success.

Later, studies increasingly embarked on the investigation of practices that can enhance employees' abilities, motivation, and opportunity and empirically examined the effectiveness of this framework (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016; Gerhart, 2017; S. Li et al., 2022; McClean & Collins, 2019). These studies empirically tested the effectiveness of the AMO framework in improving employee performance and organizational outcomes, proving again how how aligning HR practices with the principles of the AMO framework can lead to improved organizational performance. In short, the AMO model serves as a valuable framework for organizations to optimize their HRM practices by focusing on employees' abilities, motivation levels, and opportunities for growth.

In the context of startup onboarding practices, a limited number of researchers (Brattström, 2019) have provided descriptions of sporadic onboarding practices, such as on-the-job training on product development and task processes, role specialization (ability-enhancing), motivational and aspirational communications, compensation for loyalty, and mentoring programs, reorganizing reward systems, (i.e., motivation-enhancing), company culture (e.g., a clan culture highlighting internal maintenance with flexibility and concerns for people; a market culture highlighting external positioning, competition and timely decision making) (Griva et al., 2021).

Goncalves et al. (2020) reorganized work environment layout, exposing external coaches to newcomers, and entrepreneurs' sustainable ambition for growth (i.e., opportunity-enhancing). However, these actual impacts of those practices can be affected by a number of factors that are idiosyncratic to startup firms. First, startup firms often experience rate of change to capture the market opportunities. Therefore, newcomers may not be motivated to change at any moment (Griva et al., 2021; Rubera & Kirca, 2012).

Startup firms may establish a learning culture to encourage newcomers to acquire new knowledge which is outside their immediate scope of work (Calantone et al., 2003; Schein, 2010; Stock et al., 2013), such as requiring non-sales employees to improve selling skills and service attitudes that exceed customers' expectations. However, such a culture may not function properly when financial restraints prevent startup firms from timely rewarding newcomers' progress. Moreover, qualified and motivated newcomers may at first willingly contribute to the human capital that leads to startup growth (Dorf & Blank, 2012).

However, these newcomers' motivation is contingent on a good match with insiders, including not only entrepreneurs but also colleagues. As an outsider, newcomers' relationship with these insiders could be dynamic, depending on various situations (e.g., power distance

orientation and status). As their experience in the startup firms grows, newcomers may foster their own perception of whether their immediate work environment allows them to undertake the various roles and tasks competently (Hmieleski & Baron, 2008). These situations could collectively affect newcomers' emotional bond, sense of belonging, goal orientations, and eventually the motivation to commit to the startup firms (Griva et al., 2021).

A gap of adopting the AMO logic in startup firms' onboarding practices lies in the oversight of newcomers' perspective, though these perspectives can be crucial for their adjustment and socialization results. First, newcomers' motivation towards job and their sense of belong are often associated with their relationships with organizational insiders, including managers and peers (Rubenstein et al., 2020). Such relationships can affect newcomers' perceptions of the organizational culture, support, and opportunities for career growth. For instance, if newcomers feel welcomed and supported by insiders, they are more likely to feel motivated and engaged in their roles. Conversely, if they experience conflicts with insiders, it can hinder their adjustment and socialization process (P. Liu et al., 2021).

Second, as newcomers join startup firms, they will form their own perceptions of whether their new work environment allows them to undertake roles and tasks competently (M. Wang et al., 2015). Such a perception is affected by newcomers' interactions with colleagues, the support they receive, and their ability to contribute effectively to the organization (Mazzei et al., 2023). If newcomers feel empowered and competent in their roles, it enhances their sense of belonging and positive socialization outcomes in the startup. Conversely, if they perceive a mismatch between their skills and the demands of their roles, it can lead to frustration.

Third, newcomers' perspectives on onboarding practices allow individual factors such as their emotional bond with the organization and their goal orientations to be integrated to understand their socialization results (Tan et al., 2016). Positive onboarding experiences, such as clear role expectations, supportive relationships, and opportunities for growth, can foster a strong emotional connection and a sense of purpose among newcomers (Awwad et al., 2023). As a result, integrating newcomers' individual factors could better explain how they actively contribute to the startup's success and pursue meaningful goals that are aligned with those of their organizations.

Fourth, newcomers' perceptions of onboarding practices can help understand their motivation to contribute to the startup firms (Rubenstein et al., 2020). If newcomers perceive the onboarding processes as effective in facilitating their adjustment, they are more likely to feel invested in the organization and willing to contribute their time and effort to its performance. In contrast, negative onboarding experiences can erode newcomers' motivation

and commitment, leading to turnover and decreased productivity. This is particularly important when changes in startup firms may affect the expectations and experiences during the onboarding stage.

2.3.3 Literature on newcomer adjustment

After the organization-centric literature, organizational socialization research evolved from organization-centric into newcomer centric (Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 2002). Newcomers were taken into analyses to highlight how newcomers obtain the information required to make adjustment in the new organizations (Bauer & Green, 1998; Major & Kozlowski, 1997). Newcomer adjustment refers to the process where newcomers make task-specific and social-specific transitions by obtaining knowledge and learning norms expected as insiders of the organization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Köhler et al., 2011).

Organizational socialization research has transitioned from an organization-centric focus to a newcomer-centric perspective, emphasizing how newcomers acquire the necessary information to adjust to new organizational environments. This is marked by the studies of Ashford and Black (1996) and Morrison (2002), who stressed the importance of understanding how newcomers navigate and adapt to new organizational settings by acquiring essential information. Likewise, other studies shed light on how newcomers transition into their roles by learning about tasks, social norms, and expectations within the organization (Bauer & Green, 1998; Major & Kozlowski, 1997). These studies collectively highlight the role of information acquisition, learning processes, and adaptation within organizational contexts.

Newcomers may seek the relevant information about the new role and develop their own expectations. The assumption here is that newcomers may sense a high degree of uncertainty about the new roles. Such uncertainty could consume newcomers about their roles, thereby affecting their satisfaction, production, and retention (Jackson & Schuler, 1985). As such, newcomers need to timely acquire knowledge about the expected behaviors, so that they could develop a clear anticipation to their new roles (J. P. Meyer & Allen, 1997; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977).

The literature has identified a number of sources for newcomers to obtain such knowledge, including their peers, supervisors, cross-functional colleagues, and subordinates (Pinder, 2014). However, for newcomers in startup firms, such knowledge may often come from the entrepreneurs and peers. Ideally, organizational insiders constitute the most efficient source of

knowledge that can help newcomers to familiarize with the new roles.

Newcomers acquire the above knowledge through processes that involve relationships with insiders (Ashforth, 2000). The social aspects of newcomers' work environment may exceed the formal social skill training that newcomer orientations and training provide (Simosi, 2012). For instance, organizational insiders can provide critical information to support newcomers, making them feel welcome and positive about the new environment (Moreland & Levine, 2014). In contrast, some organizational insiders may exert negative impacts through undesirable behavior (Jiang et al., 2021).

Newcomers' supervisors can help newcomers to develop knowledge about the relationship dynamics within the organization, the demands about the new roles, and how their efforts contribute to the complex operations of the organization. Moreover, newcomers can develop information about the organization's mission and vision, which are embedded in norms of their daily operations. Feedback from supervisors and peers could inform newcomers how well they have achieved in following hose norms, and help them to make timely adjustment (Crant, 2000).

Researchers later developed and examined three constructs to reflect newcomer adjustment: role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance (Bauer et al., 2007; Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). Role clarity, as the first newcomer adjustment component, refers to the level of lucidness within a newcomer's anticipations of their job roles (Dierdorff et al., 2012; Newman et al., 2015; Vullinghs et al., 2020). For instance, Vullinghs et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of role clarity in organizational settings. According to Towsen et al. (2020), role clarity is crucial for employees to perform effectively and avoid ambiguity or conflict. J. Y. Chen et al. (2022) have confirmed that role clarity is positively associated with employee well-being, job satisfaction, and performance due to its contributions to clear and transparent goals and tasks, matching expectations with performance, and reducing ambiguities in job roles.

The underlying assumption of role clarity is that human behavior can be predicated through the social role that an individual takes in his or her social surroundings (Q. Y. Lee et al., 2019). Within an organization, roles suggest the functions related to a newcomer's daily tasks, as well as his or her role as an employee of a specific organization.

In other words, a high degree of role clarity suggests that the newcomer is clear about the behaviors and attitudes expected for the role (Jones, 1986; Nakani-Mapoma, 2019). Self-efficacy, as the second newcomer adjustment component, refers to a newcomer's perception how he or she can take the assigned role in the organization (Bauer et al., 2007; Miller &

Jablin, 1991). Despite their credentials and experiences, some newcomers may still face the challenges to undertake the tasks in the new organization (Bauer et al., 2007; Miller & Jablin, 1991).

A high degree of self-efficacy allows newcomers to feel confident about their assigned tasks (Jones, 1986). Therefore, self-efficacy reflects a newcomer's confidence and motivation to perform well in that role. Acceptance, the third component of newcomer adjustment, refers to the level of trust and recognition that insiders grant to the newcomer (Delobbe et al., 2016; Lapointe et al., 2014). Receptance also reflects a newcomer's fit with the new organization, where the newcomer and his or her colleagues are willing to help each other (K. A. Scott et al., 2012).

2.3.4 Moderating mechanisms in newcomer adjustment

2.3.4.1 Newcomers' power distance orientation

Another under-investigated factor during newcomers' organizational socialization process could be newcomers' power distance orientation, i.e., the degree to which a newcomer accepts the supervisor/entrepreneur's power or authority to direct his or her activities at work (Kirkman et al., 2009). Power distance orientation reflects help individuals abide by the social norm of respecting people with higher power and has been adopted to examine the interactions between leaders and followers (Dust et al., 2021) as well as mentors and proteges (C. Chen et al., 2013).

This study expands these studies by including supervisors and colleagues into newcomers' interactions, arguing that newcomers with a high power distance orientation are more likely to tolerate the social norms and tend to keep longer social distance by respecting their seniors (i.e., supervisors and veteran colleagues); and that, newcomers with a low power distance orientation are more likely to proactively explore the information relevant to their new roles and request feedback from supervisors and colleagues.

In other words, newcomers with a high power distance orientation tend to expect their supervisors and senior colleagues to provide more instructions to fulfill their roles than newcomers with a low power distance orientation. As a result, in startup firms where formal training is missing, newcomers with a high power distance orientation are more likely to experience confusion. Therefore, it can be predicted that the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment is negatively moderated by newcomers' power distance orientations, where a high power distance orientation weakens the above relationship.

2.3.4.2 Expectation-experience discrepancies

In the process of organizational socialization, newcomers will first experience the pre-entry stage, i.e., the period before newcomers embark on their positions in the new organization and develop expectations regarding their prospective role (Buchanan, 1974); Such expectations may motivate newcomers to reduce the discrepancies between their expectations and the actual job experience.

Subsequently, newcomers will experience the entry stage, i.e., the period where they start undertaking tasks, interacting with colleagues, defining their roles, and evaluating the consistencies between their expectations and the actual experiences. During this stage, newcomers may experience discrepancies between their anticipated role demands and the actual role demands, as well as the relationship with colleagues (Feldman, 1981). Finally, newcomers will experience the integration stage, i.e., the period where newcomers endeavor to shape new images, new relationships, new behaviors to demonstrate their abilities and commitment to the new organization and reach agreement with colleagues (R. Korte et al., 2015; Wanous, 1992).

According to former studies (Ashforth et al., 2018; R. Korte et al., 2015), newcomers' actual experiences in the pre-entry and entry stages are closely related to their job performance and job engagement. However, such relationships can be moderated by several factors, such as newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies and power distance orientation. This section discusses the possible moderations in the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment.

While startup firms' onboarding practices recognize the importance of how training and coaching could help individuals to form adjustment (Sluss & Thompson, 2012), socialization still involves an interactive context between newcomers and their colleagues.

During these interactions, newcomers may face conflicting experiences that demand them to make relevant adaptations to suit the new role or meet the expectations from supervisors and colleagues. These conflicting experiences form the discrepancies from newcomers' original expectations, which may further influence the perceptions and behaviors of not only newcomers but also colleagues (Collier & Callero, 2005) in startup firms.

During the pre-entry stage, newcomers may form expectations, i.e., beliefs about the most likely situation in the new organization, that are not necessarily realistic. For instance, newcomers expecting formal training may find it challenging to fulfil their roles in a startup without the specific orientations and instructions regarding their daily tasks and

responsibilities. This could lead to negative emotions from newcomers. Moreover, newcomers may expect their supervisors and colleagues to explain how their jobs blend into the operations of the firm and whom they should inquire about the relevant information (R. Korte et al., 2015).

Previous studies have suggested newcomers' proactive actions to expedite their own socialization (Y. Song et al., 2017; J. Wang & Kim, 2013). These actions include developing relationships with the supervisor/leader, exploring the work environment and seeking feedback from supervisors and colleagues, observing events in a positive manner, negotiating with the supervisor and colleagues to change one's assigned tasks, inquiring colleagues about work-related information, participating in organization's social events (e.g., sports events), and joining broader networks (Y. Song et al., 2017).

However, it is unclear whether newcomers will continuously display proactive behaviors when experiencing discrepancies, especially negative events such as supervisor/colleagues' missing support and even destructive behaviors (e.g., abusive supervision) (Jiang et al., 2021). While supervisors and colleagues may provide support to newcomers at the beginning, they may expect the newcomers to proactively develop the requisite knowledge and skills and gradually reduce their support. In that case, newcomers anticipating and experiencing warm welcome and full support at early stage may suddenly feel confusion and disappointment when experiencing reduced supports. That could lead to newcomers' misinterpretation (e.g., they are no longer important to the organization) and thereby reduce their socialization efforts.

Moreover, the leader-member exchange between supervisors and proactive newcomers may allow newcomers to acquire the job-specific resources (e.g., customer contacts for new sales agents) (R. Fang et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some newcomers may find it hard to proactively develop relationships with supervisors, especially in startup firms where supervisors and entrepreneurs are occupied with multiple tasks. Alternatively, newcomers may choose to develop relationships with colleagues to reduce ambiguity and reciprocate resources.

However, some colleagues may choose to free-ride, i.e., benefiting from newcomers and refused to reciprocate. All the above situations could expose newcomers to a negative organizational climate that contradicts his or her expectations (R. Fang et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be predicted that the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment is negatively moderated by newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies.

2.3.5 Organizational socialization results in startup firms

The literature has included several indicators in the results of newcomer organizational socialization, including job performance, work engagement, and helping behavior (T. D. Allen et al., 2017; Levi & Askay, 2020; Ostroff & Kozlowski, 2006). In organizational socialization studies, job performance refers to the degree to which a newcomer can deliver the expected outcomes for the assigned tasks (Bauer et al., 2007; H. Kim et al., 2009). Previous studies have examined the role of onboarding practices play in improving newcomers' job performance, but with conflicting results.

The study by T. D. Allen et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of linking training resources with newcomers' entry experiences to reduce uncertainty. This research emphasized association between providing easy access to relevant information and newcomers' positive attitudes and socialization outcomes within organizations, including successful adjustment, developing relevant knowledge, role clarity, and understanding of responsibilities.

The study by Levi and Askay (2020) discussed the organizational socialization outcomes related to newcomer adjustment, involving the development of sufficient knowledge and role clarity within the organization. According to these authors, successful socialization makes newcomers develop a sense of integration within the organizational culture, such more effectively navigating their new work environment.

According to Bauer and Green (1998), newcomers' onboarding practices could significantly improve their job performance in the ninth month, while Haueter et al. (2003) failed to find the positive relationship in the third month. The difference could lie in the interference of other variables (e.g., newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies), thus deserving further examination.

The study by Ilma and Desiana (2023) found the positive association between onboarding programs and newcomers' job performance, with this relationship mediated by employee creativity. Their results suggest that effective onboarding can contribute to increased employee productivity, reduced stress, enhanced commitment, and improved job satisfaction. In contrast, a Gallup study suggested that a large proportion of employees reflected negatively about their onboarding experience, with the result indicating a gap in the effectiveness of current onboarding processes in practice. Tang et al. (2022) found that challenge stressors were positively associated with newcomers' organizational socialization results, such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and job performance.

Although the benefits (e.g., reduced turnover and increased productivity) of successful

onboarding programs are well documented in several studies (Bell, 2021; Buckner-Hayden, 2014), there is still room for improvement in many organizations' onboarding processes to ensure that new employees feel prepared and supported to excel in their roles.

In term of work engagement, studies on newcomers have shown conflicting results. Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) highlighted the negative impact of relationship conflict with coworkers on newcomers' information seeking and adjustment, which further hinder newcomers' work engagement. J. Liu et al. (2021) found that coworker ostracism can lead to negative outcomes such as aggressive behavior and undermining, hampering newcomers' engagement in the organization.

A. M. Saks and Gruman (2018) reminded of a curved relationship, where newcomers display work engagement at a short period of time after entry into the organization. It is therefore worth investigating whether the onboarding practices and socialization process can help maintain newcomers' work engagement level.

Helping behavior refers a newcomer's voluntary efforts to help colleagues solve their problems or meet customers' various needs on colleagues' behalf (Hai & Park, 2021; J. B. Lin et al., 2020). While previous literature has confirmed the impact of organizational factors (e.g., organizational support and leader support), team characteristics (e.g., colleague support and team atmosphere) (Birkeland et al., 2017; Wu & Parker, 2017; D. Xu et al., 2022), task characteristics (e.g., job demands) and team characteristics (e.g., colleagues' support) (Ahmad et al., 2019), on employee outcomes, not much has been written how newcomers' values and motivations interact with the above mentioned factors to influence their helping behavior (Hai & Park, 2021).

Chapter 3: Hypothesis Development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the hypotheses regarding the relationships between the predictor variable (i.e., onboarding practices), mediating variables (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), moderating variables (i.e., power distance orientation, and expectation-experience discrepancies), and criterion variables (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement). Specifically, Section 3.2 will introduce the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance).

Section 3.3 discusses the moderating role of newcomers' power distance orientation in the hypothesized relationships in Section 3.2. Section 3.4 presents the hypotheses about the relationship between newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) and their organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement).

Section 3.5 presents the hypotheses about the mediating effects of newcomers' adjustment results between onboarding practices and organizational socialization results. Section 3.6 presents the moderating role of newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies in the hypothesized relationships in Section 3.4. Section 3.7 presents the conceptual framework of this study and summarizes this chapter.

3.2 Onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment results

This study adopts the ability-motivation-opportunity model to investigate onboarding practices for newcomers in startup firms and new ventures which is a valuable approach to enhance our understanding of the organizational socialization process (Pratiwi et al., 2018). The model allows researchers to explore the interplay between a new employee's ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform a task or exhibit a behavior (Buller & McEvoy, 2016).

In the context of start-up firms' onboarding practices, the AMO model can provide valuable insights into how start-up firms provide new employees with the necessary skills,

motivation to integrate into the organization, and opportunities to contribute effectively.

Specifically, ability-enhancing onboarding practices such as training and skill development mentoring could equip newcomers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to fulfill their roles; motivation-enhancing onboarding practices such as orientation toward startup firms' values and culture, setting realistic and meaningful goals, recognition and feedback could lead to newcomers' positive behaviors and contributions; opportunity-enhancing onboarding practices such as defining the various roles and responsibilities in startup firms, providing opportunities for newcomers to join challenging projects to advance their career and benefits, allowing newcomers to develop open communication and fair collaboration with organizational insiders (Hernandez & Menon, 2021; Jeske & Olson, 2021; Korauš et al., 2020; Sibisi & Kappers, 2022; Ziden & Joo, 2020).

3.2.1 Onboarding practices and role clarity

Studies have associated the effectively designed and implemented onboarding programs with newcomers adjusted expectations and objectives and increased satisfaction (Capitano et al., 2022). However, not much has been written about the onboarding practices within startup firms. Startup firms could design onboarding programs that help newcomers understand the specific context of their roles within the organization (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2018).

Through effective onboarding, newcomers could develop a better understanding of how their positions contribute to the overall goals of the company (Solinger et al., 2013). Indeed, when startup firms provide onboarding programs that are tailored to the specific job roles, newcomers are likely to be clear about the skills and knowledge required for the role, thus forming a clear expectation about the daily task requirements.

While startup firms may not have sufficient resources to provide extensive training, they are able to help newcomers make sense of how their jobs function within the firm, thereby reducing the uncertainty involved in their daily work by clarifying their responsibilities and developing a sense of connection to the firm (Capitano et al., 2022; Keene, 2021).

From the motivational perspective, startup firms often integrate newcomers into their organizational values and culture, allowing newcomers to develop a sense of belonging and purpose (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). In doing so, newcomers could develop a clear understanding of their role in the broader mission of the firm, thus become more motivated (J. Y. Chen et al., 2022).

Moreover, onboarding programs in startup firms often involve inviting newcomers to the

firm's goal-setting process, convincing newcomers that the organizational goals come from their insights and purposes (Ashforth et al., 2007). In doing so, newcomers may feel more motivated as their constructive suggestions and feedback to organizational goals have been recognized; moreover, including newcomers in goal setting also creates a positive work environment where newcomers feel motivated about the supportive environment but also better understand their specific roles within this work environment (Latham, 2012; Ng et al., 2021).

From an opportunity-enhancing perspective, startup firms provide onboarding programs that expose newcomers to challenging assignments that could help them achieve skill development and career growth (Preenen et al., 2015). For instance, onboarding programs that break the job description into specific tasks could help newcomers proactively develop their skills and take on additional responsibilities (Balali et al., 2020; Huvila, 2008).

Therefore, newcomers are able to understand how taking on challenging tasks could allow them to advance their careers within the dynamic context of startup firms (Hallak, 2016; Ross et al., 2014). These practices are very important for startup firms, which operate in dynamic markets and require flexible adjustments of roles and responsibilities to meet market demands (Brinckmann et al., 2019; Zolin et al., 2011). In short, the onboarding practices within startup firms could provide newcomers with the necessary abilities, motivation, and opportunities to understand better their specific roles within this work. Hence, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H1. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' role clarity.

3.2.2 Onboarding practices and self-efficacy

According to the AMO model, the ability-enhancing practices involve providing newcomers with the skills and knowledge needed for their roles (Albrecht et al., 2015). By providing those skills and knowledge, startup firms can help newcomers to improve their self-efficacy. Specifically, onboarding programs that allow newcomers to master the essential skills and knowledge to fulfill their roles could help them to work confidently and develop a sense of control in their assigned tasks (Chong et al., 2021). Moreover, skill training could reduce newcomers' self-doubt and anxiety when adjusting to new roles in startup firms (S. Lee, 2022).

Self-efficacy indicates newcomers' belief in their abilities to perform tasks and achieve goals according to role descriptions (Javed et al., 2021; Petruzziello et al., 2021). When

joining a startup firm, newcomers' initial experiences can critically affect their confidence (Bauer et al., 2021).

Startup firms' onboarding practices may include an introduction of the expectations and goals that allow newcomers to realize how accomplishing their tasks could contribute to the organization. Onboarding programs may also include recognition and rewarding policies that function as positive reinforcement to improve newcomers' sense of competence and belief in their capabilities (Put et al., 2022).

In terms of opportunity-enhancing practices, startup firms may pair newcomers with experienced colleagues who can provide guidance and support for newcomers to explore various paths to advance their careers (Joo et al., 2023; Naqshbandi et al., 2023; Szulc, 2022). Onboarding programs that pair newcomers with experienced colleagues may also showcase how those colleagues improved their skills and advanced their careers by grasping the various opportunities within the firm (Alappat, 2022).

Those cases may give newcomers confidence about their chances of career success (Gregory et al., 2020). In addition, startup firms may assign projects and responsibilities to newcomers during the onboarding programs, allowing newcomers to take ownership of those projects (Gardner et al., 2021; Godinho et al., 2023; Pavlina, 2020).

Once newcomers realize that they could make positive impacts on the project results and that their efforts are recognized by the employer, they are more likely to build confidence in their capacity to handle more challenging tasks (Kortmann et al., 2014). In short, by creating a positive and supportive onboarding experience, startup firms can set the stage for employees to feel confident and capable in their new roles. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H2. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' self-efficacy.

3.2.3 Onboarding practices and social acceptance

As a component of adjustment result, social acceptance involves the process of newcomers becoming part of the social environment of their new employers, feeling liked and accepted by their colleagues (Takeuchi et al., 2021; Yozgat & Güngörmez, 2015). Onboarding programs that enhance newcomers' abilities, motivations, and opportunities can facilitate newcomers' social acceptance by improving the integration of newcomers with organizational insiders.

First, the onboarding programs that orient newcomers to the startup firms' organizational

culture, values, and team dynamics can help them to understand the expectations and norms within the organization, thereby aligning newcomers' and organizational insiders' expectations and facilitating the social acceptance of newcomers (Elset, 2018; Gregory et al., 2022).

Second, onboarding programs often include team-building activities and collaborative exercises where newcomers can interact with colleagues and showcase their abilities and attitudes at work, which collectively enhance their social acceptance (Peacock & Ruppel, 2019; Stein & Christiansen, 2010). Informal communications with colleagues may also make newcomers feel that their opinions and suggestions are welcomed and accepted by colleagues (R. F. Korte, 2009; S. Lee, 2022).

Third, motivation-enhancing practices during onboarding in startup firms can also promote newcomers' social acceptance and inclusion within the organization. Indeed, the shared vision during onboarding programs can form a common ground for social interactions between newcomers and organizational insiders (Hall-Jones et al., 2018).

Fourth, onboarding programs that form an organizational culture of celebrating individual and team achievements can motivate newcomers to embrace the social bonds with colleagues and demonstrate to organizational insiders that they can make valuable contributions to the team (J. Kim & Jung, 2022). Moreover, motivation-enhancing activities allow newcomers to tackle team challenges by collaborating with organizational insiders (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2020; R. F. Korte, 2009). In doing so, newcomers build connections with colleagues and thereby enhance their social acceptance. Given the above discussion, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H3. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' social acceptance.

3.3 Moderating effects of power distance orientation

Newcomers' organizational socialization process features interactions with organizational insiders bearing different authority, hierarchy, and managerial power (R. L. Fang, 2008; Liao et al., 2022). As such, this thesis argues that newcomers' power distance orientation, i.e., an individual's attitude and expectation towards hierarchical relationships and distribution of power within the startup firms, could affect their adjustment results (Khatri, 2009).

For instance, newcomers bearing a high-power distance orientation may rely on superiors (e.g., supervisors and senior colleagues) to undertake their daily tasks (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). In other words, power distance orientation shapes newcomers' expectations for

ambiguity or clarity on their roles, leadership styles (e.g., autocratic leadership or servant leadership), and communication patterns (e.g., top-down or bottom-up), thereby affecting the way they adjust to the new work environment (Daniels & Greguras, 2014; Wei et al., 2017).

Previous studies have confirmed the moderating role of power distance orientation in the relationship between human resource management practices and employee results (Purwanto, 2018; Wei et al., 2017). Drawing on these studies, the following presents the role of newcomers' power distance orientation on the relationship between start-up firms' onboarding practices and newcomers' adjustment results.

As mentioned above, newcomers bearing a high-power distance orientation may primarily rely on formal channels within the organization, such as official documents and supervisor instructions, to define their roles (J. Chen, 2010). These newcomers may assume that the start-up firms already have a well-established and clearly defined role description and, thus, are less likely to obtain information and knowledge through informal and proactive means.

However, start-up firms often operate in a dynamic and evolving environment, which make it unrealistic to establish fixed role structures (Corvello et al., 2023; Gulati & DeSantola, 2016). As a result, newcomers bearing a high power-distance orientation are more likely to experience role ambiguity after the onboarding programs are over (Wei et al., 2017).

Moreover, the role clarity developed from onboarding practices could be weakened by newcomers' power distance orientation in start-up firms that often adopt a flat hierarchy and encourage proactive attitudes to engage in role definition. Newcomers with a high-power distance orientation may be more comfortable with a hierarchical organizational culture and take longer time to adjust to a flat organizational culture (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). As a result, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1a: Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and role clarity, with this relationship being weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.

Newcomers' power distance orientation may also affect the relationship between onboarding practices (i.e., ability-enhancing practices, motivation-enhancing practices, and opportunity-enhancing practices) and newcomer self-efficacy in startup firms. As mentioned above, a higher power distance orientation suggests that newcomers tend to rely on formal instructions to undertake daily activities; as such, newcomers with such an orientation are less likely to be proactive at work, and thus less likely to develop self-efficacy (J. Liu et al., 2021).

Former studies have identified how employees with a high-power distance may rely on authorities within the employer to point clear directions (Khatri, 2009). To such newcomers,

following supervisors' instructions means freedom from responsibility if any mistakes occur (Carney & Getz, 2018). Hence, newcomers with a higher power distance may refrain from actively seeking opportunities for skill development or challenging themselves with new tasks, thus less likely to build up self-efficacy through work.

Despite the ability-enhancing activities during onboarding practices, newcomers may not be able to apply the newly acquired skills to work unless they receive instructions from formal authorities (J. Chen, 2010). In contrast, startup firms often aim to empower newcomers to speak up about their ideas when in doubt, take initiatives to identify improvement areas, suggest innovative solutions, and serve as change agents (Corvello et al., 2023).

Newcomers in startup firms are expected to navigate uncertainties and embrace challenges. However, the overly dependence on supervisors' validation may lead newcomers to avoid taking risks or exploring new opportunities for skill development and confidence building, thus hindering their abilities to develop self-efficacy (Yin et al., 2023). As a result, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2a: Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and self-efficacy, with this relationship being weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.

Newcomers' power distance orientation may also influence how they perceive and engage with onboarding practices, which in turn affects their social acceptance among organizational insiders. As the literature suggests, individuals with a high-power distance orientation tend to rely on others with authoritative power for guidance and validation (Khatri, 2009).

As such, newcomers with a higher power distance orientation are more likely to follow the training instructions during the onboarding process and less inclined to engage in interactions with peer colleagues. This is despite the fact that organizational insiders actually play essential roles in newcomers' adjustment by helping them to acquire the necessary skills to perform their role and adjust to the new work environment (Miglani, 2021; Wesche & Teichmann, 2016).

Indeed, newcomers' lack of engagement with organizational insiders could impede their social acceptance at work (Cooper-Thomas, 2009; Cooper-Thomas & Burke, 2012). For instance, newcomers may passively wait for instructions on how to fulfill their roles and miss the opportunities to build relationships, which are antecedents for the quality of peer interactions.

Without effective interactions with peer colleagues, newcomers may thus feel isolated at work. In return, organizational insiders may perceive that newcomers are only responsive to

supervisor instructions; as a result, those insiders may not be willing to invite newcomers into their network, share experiences, and collaborate on projects due to a lack of trust in newcomers who appear disengaged (Mazzei et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2023).

Newcomers with higher power distance orientation thus miss the important informal communications with peer colleagues promoted by onboarding practices, therefore being unable to seek critical first-hand information that supervisors may not be aware of. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H3a: Power distance orientation negatively moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and social acceptance, with this relationship being weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.

3.4 Newcomers' adjustment results and socialization results

Newcomers who can successfully adjust to the new work environment in startup firms are more likely to present socialization results. From a role perspective, role clarity obtained from onboarding programs can help newcomers understand their responsibilities and tasks within the new employers01. In other words, newcomers with clear roles can feel empowered to provide support at the request of colleagues since they are confident about their abilities and expectations to provide help (Mazzei et al., 2023).

Moreover, role clarity allows newcomers to be certain about how helping colleagues is associated with their role descriptions, especially during uncertain and ambiguous situations (Lapointe et al., 2014). While newcomers may face situations that exceed their skill and knowledge, role clarity obtained from onboarding programs could inform newcomers whom to turn to for help.

Role clarity could also contribute to effective communication and collaboration between newcomers and organizational insiders (Kowtha, 2018). Newcomers who understand how their job roles function within the startup firms are more likely to realize the importance of providing help to colleagues to achieve shared goals (Jeske & Olson, 2021).

Those helping behaviors could also win over reciprocity from organizational insiders, thus improving newcomers' job satisfaction, which leads to further efforts to engage in helping behaviors (Frögéli & Backström Eriksson, 2023). In short, role clarity as an adjustment result contributes to a positive and supportive organizational culture where newcomers willingly engage in helping behavior. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.

In addition to helping behavior, role clarity obtained from onboarding practices can stimulate newcomers' job performance (Zhou et al., 2022). First, newcomers who are clear about their new roles within the startup firms can effectively align their efforts with organizational goals, ensuring that their tasks can effectively contribute to their teams and the start-up firms.

Second, newcomers bearing role clarity also know how to prioritize their tasks effectively and invest their time and energy in tasks that are mostly related to their job roles and positive outcomes (Diestel, 2022). In other words, role clarity allows newcomers to work more efficiently and productively. In particular, when experiencing ambiguous and conflicting tasks, newcomers with role clarity are able to engage in effective communications and collaborations with other colleagues, clarifying misunderstandings to ensure efficiency and improve job performance (Simons et al., 2022).

In short, a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities enables newcomers to adjust their efforts with organizational objectives, work more efficiently, and collaborate effectively, thus leading to enhanced job performance in the dynamic environment of startup firms. As a result, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H5. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.

Newcomers' job engagement involves their level of enthusiasm and dedication toward tasks associated with a new startup firm (James, 2020). The socialization literature has recognized the important role that job engagement plays in newcomers' job satisfaction and retention intentions (J. Xu et al., 2019; L. N. Yang et al., 2023). However, several researchers warn that job engagement can be reduced as newcomers join a new employer due to factors such as uncertainty, stress, and the need for socialization (Tang et al., 2022).

The role clarity developed from onboarding programs could help newcomers to form job engagement in several ways. First, a clearly defined role allows newcomers to align their tasks and efforts with startup firms' organizational objectives, thereby enhancing their motivation and job engagement (Rasmussen, 2022). More importantly, role clarity allows newcomers to recognize how their daily work affects the work of other colleagues and influences organizational performance, thereby shaping their sense of purpose and enhancing job engagement (J. Y. Chen et al., 2022). Previous studies have also empirically verified how clearly defined roles strengthen newcomers' motivation, which further links to their job engagement (Al Hawamdeh, 2022).

Second, role clarity helps newcomers reduce stress by minimizing the potential ambiguity

embedded in their new roles (J. Y. Chen et al., 2022; Frögéli & Backström Eriksson, 2023). As a result, newcomers are able to understand their responsibilities and undertake their tasks in an efficient manner. Such clarity also gives newcomers assurance about their abilities to fulfil the role requirements, enabling them to demonstrate engagement at work.

Third, newcomers with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities are not only able to address their own tasks but also work collaboratively with colleagues. By doing so, newcomers are able to understand the boundaries of their work and responsibilities, develop the autonomy to make decisions related to their job roles, and form a sense of ownership while at the same time addressing the concerns and requests of colleagues (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2020; A. M. Saks & Gruman, 2011).

These factors collectively enable newcomers to avoid potential conflicts and enjoy the collaborative work atmosphere, which collectively leads to enhanced job satisfaction and job engagement. As a result, role clarity is an essential element in the successful integration of newcomers in a startup organization and the promotion of their job engagement (Majid et al., 2023). Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.

As an adjustment result, self-efficacy could benefit the startup firms by enabling newcomers to engage in proactive behaviors, such as taking initiatives in their new job roles, acquiring new information from and sharing information with organizational insiders (Caliendo et al., 2023).

Previous studies have found evidence regarding individual confidence and their willingness to help. Newcomers with enhanced self-efficacy may feel more confident about their abilities to support the work of colleagues. More importantly, self-efficacy allows newcomers to develop a positive self-image and belief about the positive impacts of their contributions to the new employer. Such confidence developed from organizational socialization allows newcomers to be prepared to help colleagues (Rama & Sarada, 2017).

Additionally, self-efficacy in solving the various problems associated with the new job roles enables newcomers to address the stress originated from high-pressure situations, and more importantly, share more time and resources to help other colleagues involved in the similar stressful situations (Guillén, 2021).

In this way, newcomers may be considered as role models in their own positions, thus inspiring other colleagues to share experience and knowledge to address various challenges in the startup firms and collectively contributing a culture of mutual help (Filstad, 2004). In short, enhanced self-efficacy is associated with newcomers' increased confidence and the

ability to serve as role models to help other colleagues. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H7. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.

Self-efficacy has been recognized as an important antecedent of employee job performance in various settings (Petruzziello et al., 2021). However, the specific mechanism that links the variables in the context of newcomers' organizational socialization deserves further exploration.

An employee's job performance may not always depend on his or her efforts at work; in particular, job performance may depend on the support of other colleagues (Pelin & Osoian, 2021). Self-efficacy allows newcomers to communicate effectively with organizational insiders and collaboratively solve the various problems appearing at work (McNatt & Judge, 2008), thereby improving their coordinated effort and job performance.

Moreover, self-efficacy enables newcomers to take the initiative to understand and embrace the culture of acquiring new information and new knowledge required for startup firms (Newman et al., 2015). Proactive learning could help newcomers to continuously improve their abilities and knowledge, two important antecedents of job performance (Arnold B Bakker et al., 2012).

Self-efficacious newcomers may present more confidence in addressing the various demands from internal customers (i.e., colleagues) and external customers since confidence allows newcomers to build positive relationships with those customers (Filstad, 2004). From a leadership perspective, self-efficacious employees can proactively serve the role of emergent leaders within startup firms, effectively contributing to the coordination activities within the organization and forming a supportive organizational culture that enhances each other's job performance (Alikhani & Shahriari, 2022). Given the above discussion, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H8. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.

Self-efficacy involves employees investing more effort and perseverance when pursuing job-related goals, thereby forming a positive motivational attitude towards work, i.e., job engagement (Na-Nan & Sanamthong, 2020). In the context of organizational socialization, newcomers in start-up firms are expected to engage in collaborative and interdependent tasks.

Self-efficacy developed from onboarding programs imparts the confidence that enables newcomers to develop a collaborative mindset and the belief that they can contribute to the collective goals of the new employer (G. Chen & Klimoski, 2003). Such confidence will drive newcomers to demonstrate job engagement.

Newcomers with such mindsets and beliefs are more likely to commit themselves to the learning activities that lead to career development; in return, such commitment may enable newcomers to prepare for the new challenges embedded in startup firms' daily operations through innovative methods. In other words, self-efficacy helps newcomers to adopt new ideas and perspectives to address emerging problems at work (Jeong et al., 2022).

Moreover, self-efficacy could enable newcomers to assume leadership roles where they proactively enhance the performance of not only themselves but also their colleagues (Guillén, 2021). Self-efficacious newcomers may also actively seek feedback from colleagues and customers to enhance their future performance. Drawing on the above discussion, this study predicts that self-efficacy is an important antecedent of newcomers' job engagement in startup firms. Such a relationship is reflected in newcomers' proactive and confident task engagement and commitment to their continuous improvement at work. Hence, the following hypothesis can be predicted:

H9. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.

Social acceptance indicates newcomers' awareness that they are being liked and accepted by organizational insiders and can predict the organizational socialization results of newcomers (Frögéli & Backström Eriksson, 2023). Newcomers who can achieve social acceptance by organizational insiders can confidently be involved in collaborations that involve helping colleagues solve cross-functional problems.

In addition, socially accepted newcomers are likely to exchange experience and skills that contribute not only to their own improvement but also to their colleagues' improvement (Cooper-Thomas, 2009). Socially accepted newcomers may be invited to peer-support groups where they can serve as mentors and mentees at the same time (Crooks et al., 2022).

Mutual support is especially important in startup firms that operate in dynamic and changing business environments filled with challenges (Cheah et al., 2019). In such situations, newcomers who are accepted by organizational insiders may be invited to join important decision-making meetings, where they can contribute ideas and support that lead to the success of colleagues and the entire team. In other words, invitations from organizational insiders may make newcomers develop a sense of ownership that motivates them to help colleagues achieve the shared goals.

Socially accepted newcomers may appreciate the opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and decision-making invitations by contributing their skills and support for organizational insiders so that they can achieve organizational goals together (Miglani, 2021). The following hypothesis is, therefore, proposed:

H10. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.

In addition to helping colleagues, socially accepted newcomers are likely to deliver superior performance at work (Nasr et al., 2019). Indeed, the cross-functional collaborations invited by organizational insiders provide newcomers with opportunities to acquire complementary skills, different perspectives, and rich experiences from colleagues with various backgrounds to improve job performance.

Moreover, organizational insiders may be willing to share the insights and expectations that help newcomers quickly adapt to the new task requirements. Social acceptance suggests harmonious relationships and limited conflicts at work so that newcomers can focus on their tasks without disturbances (Wan et al., 2022). As mentioned above, socially accepted newcomers are likely to be invited to innovative projects in startup firms where they are encouraged to make proactive suggestions and test their innovative ideas.

The support and suggestions from organizational insiders may enable newcomers to test and improve their ideas, which eventually leads to performance improvement (James, 2020). In short, social acceptance provides harmonious relationships, colleagues' support, knowledge and skill sharing, and reduced conflicts that clear the obstacles for newcomers to achieve superior performance. As a result, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H11. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.

Social acceptance may also play an essential role in the job engagement of newcomers (Chong et al., 2021). First, social acceptance suggests that the newcomers' talents and contributions are recognized by organizational insiders, who may include newcomers in the various activities and responsibilities that give newcomers a sense of value at work, thereby enhancing their job engagement (Miglani, 2021).

Socially accepted newcomers may receive constructive and friendly feedback from organizational insiders to gradually improve not only their skills but also their trust, which are essential antecedents of job engagement. Moreover, social acceptance suggests that organizational insiders are willing to give flexibility and understanding at work, thus allowing newcomers to work in an environment with minimum stress (Qadeer et al., 2020).

Once newcomers realize the opportunities and support provided by organizational insiders, they are more likely to appreciate the growth contributed by colleagues, thereby becoming more engaged in their work. As a result, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H12. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.

3.5 Mediating effects of newcomers' adjustment results

This study also follows organizational socialization studies to examine the mediating effect of newcomers' adjustment results on the relationship between onboarding practices and socialization outcomes (Mazzei et al., 2023; Norris, 2022). Onboarding practices are designed to provide newcomers with the necessary support and information to help newcomers understand the specific context of their roles within the organization (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2018), develop the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill their roles with confidence (S. Lee, 2022), and successfully integrate into new employers (Peacock & Ruppel, 2019; Stein & Christiansen, 2010).

However, the extent to which newcomers willingly engage in helping behavior may be influenced by their level of role clarity. Indeed, when newcomers have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities and how their tasks intersect with others within the organization, they are more likely to feel confident in their abilities to contribute positively to the team, thereby fostering a culture of collaboration and support (Liao et al., 2022; Mazzei et al., 2023).

Likewise, the link between onboarding practices and newcomers' job performance is explained by the degree of newcomers' role clarity they have experienced. In particular, a clear understanding of job expectations and how their tasks contribute to the overall organizational goals may allow newcomers to effectively fulfill their tasks and achieve optimal performance levels (Bauer et al., 2007; Ślebarska & Soucek, 2020). In other words, role clarity serves as a guiding mechanism that allows newcomers to prioritize their responsibilities, make informed investment of their time and efforts towards tasks that are most aligned with organizational objectives of startup firms, thereby delivering superior job performance.

As discussed in Section 3.4, role clarity also plays a crucial role in shaping newcomers' job engagement within startup firms. Well-designed onboarding practices can foster a sense of belonging and purpose among newcomers (A. M. Saks et al., 2007), laying the foundation for heightened job engagement. Nevertheless, it is unclear that, without a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, newcomers may feel uncertainty and ambiguity, which can reduce their engagement levels.

When newcomers have a clear sense of direction and purpose within their roles, they are more likely to feel motivated and invested in their work (Mazzei et al., 2023), thereby demonstrating greater levels of job engagement. Drawing on the above discussion, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

H5a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.

H6a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.

In addition to role clarity, newcomers' helping behavior may also depend on their levels of self-efficacy. Indeed, the degree to which onboarding practices can shape newcomers' helping behavior depends on whether newcomers are likely to perceived themselves as capable contributors to their teams (J. Liu et al., 2021). In this sense, the effectiveness of onboarding practices on newcomers can drive newcomers to engage in helping behaviors that facilitate the success of organizational insiders through the development of newcomers' self-efficacy.

Likewise, while onboarding practices provide the essential motivation and opportunities for newcomers to acquire the knowledge, skills, and tools to perform in their roles, the conversion of those job-related resources into job performance might be contingent on newcomers' confidence in their abilities (Arnold B Bakker et al., 2012). Therefore, newcomers' self-efficacy serves as a crucial mechanism through which onboarding practices within startup firms can influence newcomers' job performance.

Moreover, self-efficacy developed from effective onboarding practices enables newcomers to develop a sense of competence and confidence. As a result, newcomers with growing confidence about their job-related skills are more likely to experience increased enthusiasm and engagement in their work (Ślebarska & Soucek, 2020). In short, self-efficacy plays a mediating effect in the relationships between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement. The following hypotheses are thus formulated:

H7a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

H8a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.

H9a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.

An essential function of onboarding practices is to help newcomers adjust to the new organizational culture and integrate into the social fabric (Klein et al., 2015). With a relatively

small number of employees, startup firms often rely on a strong sense of community to achieve collaboration to achieve superior performance (Goffee & Jones, 1996).

Social acceptance within a startup environment plays an essential role of newcomers' helping behavior. The appreciation and inclusion from colleagues and supervisors may stimulate newcomers to engage in proactive behaviors such as helping colleagues (Yin et al., 2023). This is triggered by newcomers' sense of belonging and acceptance which further lead to trust and reciprocity among employees of startup firms.

In such a mutually supportive climate, employees are willing to work beyond their job responsibilities to help each other (Goffee & Jones, 1996). As a result, social acceptance felt by newcomers serves as a mediator in the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

Several studies have argued that job performance in startup firms may not only depend on their skills and abilities but also on their level of engagement and social integration within the organizational context (Jo & Eom, 2018; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). The impact of onboarding practices on newcomers' performance outcomes in startup firms might depend on essential mechanism of social acceptance.

Indeed, when newcomers feel accepted and supported by organizational insiders, they tend to develop more job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the employer (Takeuchi et al., 2021). Such a positive social setting within startup firms can lead to open communication, knowledge sharing, and collaboration, which are essential for newcomers to deliver high job performance in startup firms.

In addition, onboarding practices can shape newcomers' initial experiences and perceptions of the organization (Jeske & Olson, 2021). The positive experiences and perceptions can further lead to job engagement. Indeed, job engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Reed, 2016). The dynamic nature of startup firms may lead employees to feel ambiguous job demands.

Social acceptance enables newcomers to feel a sense of belonging and connection to their positions, colleagues, and the startup firms (Takeuchi et al., 2021). This sense of belonging further enhances their motivation, enthusiasm, and willingness to invest more efforts in their roles, thus demonstrating a higher level of job engagement. Therefore, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H10a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

H11a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in

startup firms and newcomers' job performance.

H12a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.

3.6 Moderating effects of expectation-experience discrepancies

Practices in startup firms are often greatly influenced by the founders who may come from different backgrounds and experiences (Park & Kim, 2023). In particular, founders with limited experience in growing the company lead a team of organizational insiders and newcomers to achieve organizational goals in a dynamic market; they may make decisions that result in uncertainty and unpredictability in the firm operations (Gifford et al., 2021).

When the founders have to perform various tasks, they have limited time to systematically develop the organizational routines, causing the expectation and experience discrepancies that result in newcomers' organizational socialization results (Gifford et al., 2021).

Despite the onboarding programs, newcomers may still go through expectation-experience discrepancies, i.e., the gaps between what newcomers expect during the onboarding programs and what they actually experience after they finish those programs (Biles et al., 2022); that is, the gap between what newcomers initially feel about the startup firms during the onboarding training and what they actually experienced at work after onboarding practices.

Such discrepancies have been adopted by researchers in psychology and organizational behavior to explain an individual's cognitive dissonance when the outcome contradicts the expectation (Mahapatra & Mishra, 2022). This thesis suggests that expectation-experience discrepancies could moderate the relationship between newcomers' adjustment results and their socialization results.

As discussed above, the role clarity obtained from onboarding programs could encourage proactive behaviors that contribute to startup firms' organizational goals. For instance, newcomers with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities are likely to involve themselves in various helping behaviors.

However, startup firms operating in dynamic changes are forced to make constant adaptations to employees' job responsibilities (Haase & Eberl, 2019). In fact, many startup firms require their employees to be adaptable and flexible in their roles along with their development and evolution (Gulati & DeSantola, 2016). Such changes may contradict the

expectations shaped by job descriptions during the onboarding programs.

Previous studies have demonstrated how discrepancies between expectations and experiences can affect the psychological contract between employees and their employers (Kutaula et al., 2020; Sivarajan et al., 2021). In particular, those discrepancies can harm newcomers' motivation to support colleagues since they may question whether the firms would genuinely appreciate their contribution and value (J. H. Yang et al., 2022).

In addition, newcomers may feel reluctant to help others when their expected recognition and rewards promised during onboarding programs are not timely rewarded due to organizational and market changes (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022). As such, newcomers may feel unfairly treated and thus reluctant to make contributions beyond their described roles. Given such a discussion, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H4b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and helping behavior, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

Likewise, discrepancies between newcomers' expectations and experiences may have a significant impact on their performance. Newcomers may assume that they have a clear understanding of the roles and form expectations about the requirements to fulfil those roles effectively, as well as the corresponding rewards (Kutaula et al., 2020). However, discrepancies could occur due to miscommunications or misunderstandings during the onboarding programs, the evolving nature of startup firms, and changes in startup firms' organizational dynamics (Salvation, 2019).

These contingencies could collectively reduce the impact of role clarity on newcomers' job performance. For instance, newcomers encountering such discrepancies may struggle to align their skills and efforts to the expected demands and rewards of their job roles, thereby hampering their motivation to make further efforts and harming their job performance (Gordon, 2020; M. Wang et al., 2011).

In short, the interactive effect of role clarity during onboarding programs and the discrepancies between the expectations and actual experiences may negatively affect the positive impact of role clarity on job performance. As a result, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H5b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job performance, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

Newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies may interact with role clarity to affect

newcomers' job engagement (Gordon, 2020). On the one hand, job engagement involves newcomers' involvement, dedication, and enthusiasm toward their roles. On the other hand, such discrepancies cause the misalignment that creates a cognitive dissonance, i.e., the psychological discomfort due to conflicting beliefs. To address such dissonance, newcomers may reduce their work engagement to rematch their efforts and involvement with the actual rewards they received rather than those promised (Nguyen et al., 2021; Zou et al., 2020).

Moreover, newcomers with role clarities expect to form reciprocal relationships with organizational insiders to exchange support and rewards. However, when such expectations are met with unpleasant experiences in their roles (e.g., free riders), the expected reciprocity will be disrupted. This may result in newcomers' reduced intention to invest additional effort in interactions with colleagues at work and time and energy for tasks beyond their expectations. Hence, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H6b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job engagement, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

Newcomers with self-efficacy may perform positive workplace behaviors (e.g., helping colleagues and sharing knowledge) to demonstrate their confidence at work (M. Y. Wang et al., 2021). Additionally, those self-efficacious newcomers may expect higher outcomes from their efforts and helping behaviors.

However, the misalignments between those expectations and the actual experiences may significantly lead to newcomer doubts about the value of their helping behaviors. For instance, newcomers expecting to succeed in a new role but facing repeated failures at work may have reduced self-efficacy (Jeong et al., 2022).

Moreover, studies have found that repeated failures can deplete newcomers' perceived resources, leading to physical and mental exhaustion (Lan et al., 2020). Newcomers with limited resources may, in response, prioritize their tasks over helping others. Given the above discussion, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H7b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and helping behavior, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

Self-efficacy provides the confidence, perseverance, and proactive attitudes to job tasks that lead to employees' superior performance (Na-Nan & Sanamthong, 2020). However, the negative experiences of job roles and work environments due to miscommunications, changing job requirements, and evolving job descriptions may lead to newcomers'

psychological discomfort and weaken their confidence and positive job performance.

Such an association can also be explained by newcomers' reduced motivation. That is, notable disparities between their expectations and experiences may harm newcomers' motivation to perform at their best, thereby displaying reduced performance (Miglani, 2021). As a result, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H8b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and job performance, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

Expectation-experience discrepancies may induce doubt and uncertainty, challenging newcomers' perceptions of their competence and thereby making them less engaged at work (S. L. Jordan et al., 2022). Studies have found that unmet expectations at work can significantly impact newcomers' adjustment and engagement (Ślebarska & Soucek, 2020; Welander et al., 2020).

As an essential result of organizational socialization, newcomers' job engagement is affected by factors such as organizational resources, personal resources, and job demands. In the unique organizational context of startup firms, the dynamic and rapidly changing conditions that require them to respond timely to customer demands and market turbulences (Tang et al., 2022).

Such organizational acts are translated into new and uncertain requirements for employees. In particular, when the job demands exceed the newcomers' job-related resources, they may demonstrate reduced job engagement. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H9b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and job engagement, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

Previous studies have recognized the influence of experiences and expectations on individuals' perceptions and behaviors (Giorgetta et al., 2021; Tamir & Bigman, 2018). While newcomers may expect fair treatment and exchange during interactions and cooperations with organizational insiders, they may actually experience colleague behaviors that breach their expectations. For instance, newcomers may be required to contribute more personal resources, thus violating their expected fair resource exchange (AlMehairi, 2019).

As a result, newcomers may reduce their helping behavior to preserve important personal resources. In other words, when newcomers experience a misalignment between their expectations and actual social acceptance, it may weaken the link between social acceptance and their willingness to engage in helping behaviors. Thus, this study proposes the following

hypothesis:

H10b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and helping behavior, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

The occurrence of expectation-experience discrepancies may also add complexity to the relationship between social acceptance and newcomers' job performance (Cook, 2004; Rogers & Ward, 1993). These discrepancies may result in psychological impacts such as reduced motivation, job satisfaction, and job performance. In particular, newcomers may form an ideal expectation about how to interact and cooperate with organizational insiders after onboarding practices (Ilgen, 1971; S. L. Jordan et al., 2022).

However, when newcomers find inconsistent experiences due to the work characteristics (i.e., supervisors demand more hours and efforts), social exchanges (i.e., promised resources and supports are missing), and empowerment (i.e., reduced autonomy in making decisions), their insufficient motivations and resources would prevent them delivering superior performance (Ślebarska & Soucek, 2020; Zoethout et al., 2010). As a result, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H11b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job performance, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

While newcomers may acquire initial acceptance by organizational insiders through onboarding programs, their relationships are still at the surface level (Zhou et al., 2022). To further enhance social relationships with colleagues, newcomers need enough socialization resources, i.e., the skills, means, and processes that newcomers have acquired to fulfill not only their own roles but also support the roles of colleagues (G. Chen & Klimoski, 2003).

The unexpected demands or requests from organizational insiders may quickly deplete newcomers' socialization resources, leading to stress and exhaustion and reduced job engagement (Lan et al., 2020). Moreover, resource depletion due to unexpected demands may harm newcomers' work-life balance and result in negative outcomes such as reduced engagement (Fan & Potočnik, 2021). Hence, this study further predicts the following hypothesis:

H12b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job engagement, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

To summarize, the above hypotheses constitute the research framework of this study. As

Figure 3.1 illustrates, startup firms' onboarding practices influence newcomer adjustment, with the relationships moderated by newcomers' power distance orientation. Newcomers' adjustment influences their socialization results, with the relationships moderated by newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies.
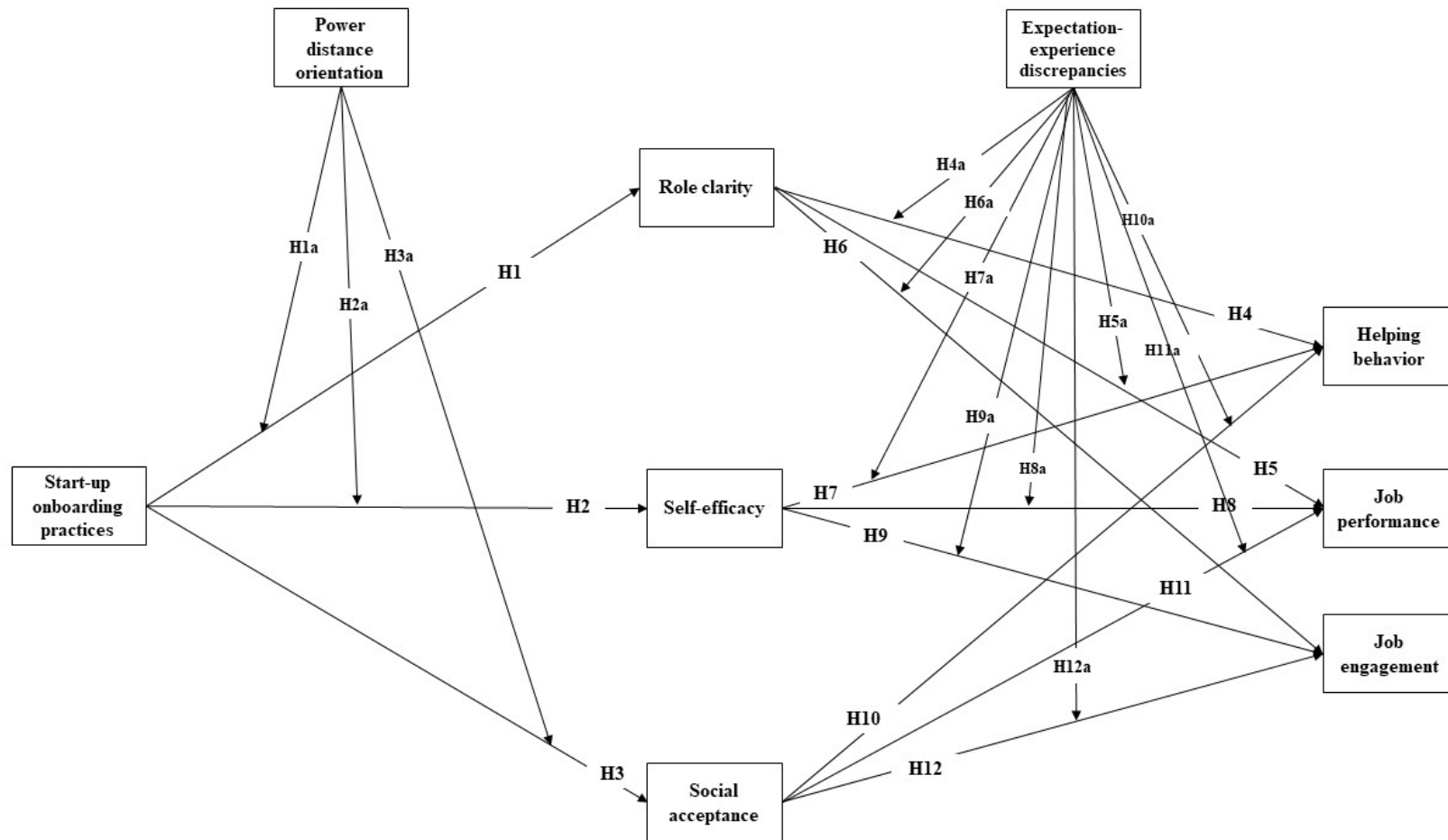
Figure 3.1 Conceptual model

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a number of arguments to link startup firms' onboarding practices, newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement), as well as the moderating role of newcomers' power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies. In total, 36 research hypotheses have been proposed and discussed in detail. The next chapter presents the research methodology that has been selected to test those hypotheses and the conceptual model.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

4.1 Introduction

As is introduced in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to examine how startup firms with limited resources stimulate newcomers to transition into organizational insiders through onboarding practices that foster role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance, how newcomers' power distance orientations affect their adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) in the new organization, and how expectation-experience discrepancies moderate the relationship between their adjustment results and three important organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement).

To address those research objectives, the theoretical hypotheses regarding the key variables mentioned above were presented in Chapter 3. The present chapter introduces the steps to substantiate those hypotheses and the conceptual framework through empirical validation, a process contingent upon the acquisition of sample data (Mizrahi, 2020).

This chapter outlines the research methods used to conduct this quantitative study of newcomers to startup firms, beginning with the introduction of research design and data collection procedure (Section 4.2), followed by details in questionnaire design (definitions and operationalization of the measures of the predictor variables) in Section 4.3, and initial data analysis results, including the demographic information (Section 4.4) and reliability and validity tests (Section 4.5), with Section 4.6 summarizing this chapter.

4.2 Research design and data collection procedures

A quantitative approach was used for this study, more specifically a surveyed-based correlational design with primary data collected from newcomers and their direct supervisors was selected for the empirical analysis of the study's research model. According to Podsakoff et al. (2024), adopting the double source can help mitigate the potential impact of common method bias that may appear when using a single data source. Moreover, this approach provides a balanced view of the constructs under study, thus helping reduce the inaccuracies

from a single-source self-reported data (P. J. Jordan & Troth, 2020).

The sample for this study was drawn from the lists of startup firms located in Chengdu and Hangzhou in China. The local business associations recommended a list of 229 cultural and creative startup firms, which hired around 7131 newcomers over the past 24 months. The human resource departments of those 229 firms were invited to support the data collection.

Among those firms, 84 firms agreed to facilitate the data collection by sharing the research content and objective of this study through their online work groups through a digital platform, Corporate Wechat. Meanwhile, the author replaced participants' names and any other directly identifying information (e.g., employee ID numbers) with randomly assigned codes. This way, the data was de-linked from participants' individual identities.

With the support of the human resource management departments of 84 firms, 982 newcomers and their immediate supervisors (177) agreed to participate in the survey. Each participate had the opportunity to have a lucky draw for 50 portable power banks, each of which worth $7 USD. Eventually, 716 newcomers and their 119 supervisors completed the survey. Among these respondents, 96 respondents were removed from the analysis as their tenure (more than two years) did not meet the newcomer definition, leaving 620 usable responses from 620 newcomers and 119 from supervisors.

(1) The author developed an online survey using a widely used online survey platform, WENJUANXING, which is known for its efficiency in survey administration and data collection. The online survey was made available via weblinks and shared to the prospective respondents in Corporate WeChat groups. The survey included two questionnaires, namely a newcomer-reported questionnaire and a supervisor-reported questionnaire. The questionnaire design process is outlined as follows:

(2) In the initial stage of questionnaire design, the main variables and specific dimensions were adapted from existing studies. Specifically, relevant studies were consulted to find similar measurement scales. The measurement questions needed for this study were adapted accordingly.

(3) The author of this study also consulted experts, including his two supervisors, professors in organizational behavior, as well as human resource managers, to look at the English and Chinese translation. They suggested that the survey should be collected from newcomers and their supervisors, with the supervisor rating newcomer performance and helping behavior.

(4) The Chinese translation was pre-tested by five human resource managers from startup firms. The human resource managers were familiar with their firms' onboarding practices and

newcomers' performance indicators; they supported the data collection but did not participate in the final survey.

(5) The pre-test was conducted to check the study approach with a small element of the newcomers and their supervisors. This test ensured that respondents consistently understand the survey's purpose, instructions, and questions. Timing for the survey by test respondents was captured to provide time estimations to future respondents, and survey feedback was collected to make any necessary adjustments to the survey prior to dissemination to the research population. This step helped identify any issues related to questionnaire translation and completion, misunderstandings, or comprehension difficulties.

(6) The final versions of the questionnaires were crafted based on the feedback and problems observed during the pre-test, resulting in well-adjusted and validated questionnaires.

After data collection, the implementation of statistical tools to analyze the variables of interest and their intercorrelations allowed to identify patterns and make generalizations regarding the larger population (Pyrczak, 2016).

The chi-square test of independence, correlation, and standard simple and multiple regressions were used to test for relationships between main variables. The associations between key variables were measured to quantify the strengths of the hypothesized relationships (Savin, 1984; Snyder & Swann, 1978). Measures of association between variables were generally scaled to range from 0 (no relationship with each other) to a maximum numerical value of +1.00 (perfect positive relationship) or −1.00 (perfect negative relationship), with weaker relationships closer to 0 and stronger relationships closer to +/− 1.00 (Cronk, 2017).

Tests of significance were conducted for the measures of association (Roberts et al., 2019). Multiple linear regression analyses were used in this study to determine whether or not significant predictive relationships existed between the main variables and, if so, the directions of these relationships (Cronk, 2017). The moderating effect were be conducted through multiple linear regression (Berry & Feldman, 1985; Hayes, 2017).

4.3 Measurement instruments

The measurement instruments for all the variables used for the two questionnaires were adapted from existing studies (see Annex). Those instruments have been adopted.

A survey request message was included in both surveys to explain the survey intent and provide the link to the survey. Both surveys started with the informed consent followed by

sections with the variables' measurement instruments. The consent form included a description of the study's purpose and how the data will be used as research indicates this information enhances respondent cooperation, as well as a statement regarding the voluntary nature of participating in the research and the ability to withdraw at any time should the respondent become uncomfortable with the process or specific survey items.

A statement assuring the anonymity of respondents would remain anonymous was also included, which may improve the likelihood of answers to questions (Ong & Weiss, 2000). The ethical conduct proposed by the Declaration of Helsinki's research guidelines was observed in the study.

To ensure discrimination and prevent issues arising from a wide range of options, all answers were provided in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A Likert scale is a commonly used psychometric tool that involves a range of responses to a statement, from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' It enables the evaluation of degree of agreement or disagreement with a particular statement or the intensity of a person's feelings towards something (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021).

The Likert scale has been extensively adopted by organizational behavior studies because it provides a finer degree of measurement than simple binary (yes/no) responses, allowing for more detailed insights into respondents' opinions (Sullivan & Artino Jr, 2013).

4.3.1 Questionnaire for supervisors

The supervisor-reported questionnaire primarily evaluates supervisors' evaluation of newcomers' helping behavior and job performance. It included the informed consent and two additional sections. The first section includes each respondent's demographic information (i.e., assigned participant code, tenure, gender, age, and education). The second section focuses on assessing the assigned newcomers' helping behavior and job performance. The measurement instruments are detailed below.

4.3.1.1 Helping behavior

Newcomers' helping behavior (HB) in this study refers to their voluntary efforts to help colleagues address problems or to meet customers' various needs on colleagues' behalf (Hai & Park, 2021; W. Lin et al., 2022). HB was measured using the 7-item scale adapted from Van Dyne and LePine (1998). This scale has been adopted by studies in the Chinese context (L. Zhang et al., 2017). Examples of items included in the HB are: 'This particular co-worker volunteers to do things for this company.' and 'This particular co-worker often gets involved

in benefiting this company.'

4.3.1.2 Job performance

Newcomers' job performance (JP) in this study refers to the degree to which a newcomer performs in his or her job duties according to role descriptions (Jokisaari, 2013). JP was measured using the five-item scale adapted from Edgar et al. (2021). Examples of items included in the JP are: 'This particular co-worker has carried out the core parts of his/her job well.' and 'This particular co-worker has adapted well to changes in main tasks.'

4.3.2 Questionnaire for newcomers

The newcomer-reported questionnaire included informed consent plus five sections. The first section included each respondent's demographic information (i.e., assigned code and control variables). Section 1 also automatically discontinued the survey if the respondent worked in the company for more than two years (i.e., violating the definition of newcomers).

The second section focuses on assessing the onboarding practices startup firms provided to newcomers. Specifically, respondents were asked to evaluate their experiences of the new employers' ability-enhancing practices, motivation-enhancing practices, and opportunity-enhancing practices.

The third section investigates newcomers' adjustment results, i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance, and power distance orientation. The fourth section gathers data on newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies. The fifth section examines newcomers' job engagement. The measures included in the different section are described below.

4.3.2.1 Job engagement

Newcomers' job engagement (JE) in this study refers to their positive and satisfying mentality towards work that is featured with vigor, dedication, and absorption (Batra & Hyde, 2020). JE was measured by adapting the nine-item scale from Z. Song et al. (2015). Examples of items included in the JC are: 'When I am working, I feel bursting with energy.' and 'I get carried away when I am working.'

4.3.2.2 Startup onboarding practices

Startup firms' onboarding practices (SP) refer to these firms' organizational endeavor and practices to facilitate employee socialization, including the ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing practices (Trullen et al., 2016). SP was measured by adapting the 16-item scale from Edgar et al. (2021).

Examples of items included in the SP are: 'Our onboarding training involves skills that make me feel confident that I can always successfully perform whatever is required in my job.' and 'Our onboarding training involves contents that motivate me to put forward my best efforts to get the job done regardless of the difficulties I may experience.'

4.3.2.3 Role clarity

Newcomers' role clarity (RC) in this study refers to the level of lucidness within their anticipations of the job roles. RC was measured by adapting the four-item scale from Nasr et al. (2019). Examples of items included in the RC are: 'I know exactly what is expected of me.' and 'I am clear how I will be evaluated for job performance.'

4.3.2.4 Self-efficacy

Newcomers' self-efficacy (SE) in this study refers to their perception of how they can take the assigned role in the organization (Ellis et al., 2023). SE was measured by adapting the eight-item scale from Jones (1986). Examples of items included in the SE are: 'My new job is well within the scope of my abilities.' and 'I have all the technical knowledge I need to deal with my new job.'

4.3.2.5 Social acceptance

Newcomers' social acceptance (SA) in this study refers to their feeling of being welcomed and integrated into the social environment in the startup firm. It involves developing relationships with colleagues, building a sense of belonging, and feeling accepted and valued (Bauer et al., 2007). SA was measured using the four-item scale from Nasr et al. (2019). Examples of items included in the SA are: 'I believe most of my colleagues like me.' and 'I am pretty popular in this company.'

4.3.2.6 Power distance orientation

Newcomers' power distance orientation (PDO) in this study refers to their perception of the distribution of power within the organization and their willingness to conform to the organization's hierarchy (Cheng Chen et al., 2014). PDO was measured using the six-item scale from Lam and Xu (2019).

Examples of items included in the PDO are: 'People at junior levels should not have much power in the company.' and 'A company's rules should not be broken, not even when the employee thinks it is in the company's best interest.'

4.3.2.7 Expectation-experience discrepancies

Newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies (EED) refer to the difference between what they expect from their new job and employer and what they actually experience (Wanous et al., 1992). EED was measured by adapting the 13-item scale from Pleitz et al. (2015).

Examples of items included in the EED are: 'I feel like the company's recruitment materials were not accurately portrayed.' and 'It was harder adjusting to the new work environment than I thought it would be.'

4.3.2.8 Control variables

This study follows previous practices to control the variables that could account for potential confounding factors that may affect the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment (Choi, 2014; Tang et al., 2022; Wanberg & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000).

These control variables include newcomers' tenure (the length of time that a newcomer has been employed by the organization), gender (male =1, female=0), age, education, interaction experience with supervisor (i.e., the length of time that a newcomer interacts with their supervisor), and frequency of interaction with supervisor.

4.4 Demographic information

4.4.1 Newcomers

The demographic characteristics of the newcomer respondents are presented in Table 4.1. As mentioned before, responses of employees who joined the startup companies for more than two years were excluded from the survey to comply with the definition of newcomers (n=96). This led to 620 responses that met the criteria, among whom 309 (49.8%) were males and 311 (50.2%) females. Among the 620 respondents, 213 (34.4%) joined the current employers for less than six months; followed by 151 (24.4%) respondents who joined the current employers between 19 and 24 months, 144 (23.2%) respondents who joined the current employers between six and 12 months, and 112 (18.1%) respondents who joined the current employers between 12 and 18 months.

Table 4.1 Demographic information (Newcomers)

Employee		Frequency	Percentage
Tenure	Less than six months	213	34.4%
	6- 12 months	144	23.2%
	12-18 months	112	18.1%
	18-24 months	151	24.4%
Gender	Male	309	49.8%
	Female	311	50.2%
Age	21-29	275	44.4%
	30-39	196	31.6%
	40-49	130	21.0%
	50-59	14	2.3%
	60 or older	5	0.8%
Education	High school or below	7	1.1%
	2-3-year college	46	7.4%
	4-year university	364	58.7%
	Graduate-level degree	197	31.8%
	None of the above	6	1.0%
Experience with supervisor	Less than six months	389	62.7%
	6- 12 months	130	21.0%
	12-18 months	91	14.7%
	18-24 months	10	1.6%
Interaction frequency with supervisor	On a daily basis	137	22.1%
	Weekly basis	194	31.3%
	Twice a month	261	42.1%
	Monthly	28	4.5%

Note: n = 620

When it comes to age, 275 respondents fell into the 21-29 age group, accounting for the largest proportion (44.4%), followed by the 196 respondents who aged between 30 and 39 accounting for 31.6%, the 130 respondents who aged between 40 and 49 accounting for 21.0%, the 14 respondents aged between 50 and 59 accounting for 2.3%, and five respondents aged 60 and above, accounting for 0.8%. This pattern seems to suggest that startup firms are more likely to attract young newcomers (Olugbola, 2017).

This result might be explained by previous finding that young talents are willing to join young firms in order to earn higher salaries, especially young firms with potential for growth (Ouimet & Zarutskie, 2014). When it comes to education, most respondents (364) had completed a four-year university education, making up 58.7% of all respondents; followed by the 197 respondents (31.8%) who attended postgraduate schools, the 46 respondents (7.4%) who attended 2-3-year colleges, with 13 respondents (2.1%) who did not attend college or university.

Most of the respondents (391, 63.17%) worked with the current supervisor for less than six months, followed by those (136, 21.97%) with six to 12 months of experience working with the current supervisor, those (88, 14.22%) with 12 to 18 months of experience working with the current supervisor, those (four, 0.65%) with 18 to 24 months of experience working

with the current supervisor. As for interaction frequency, 43.46% of respondents (269) had meetings with supervisor on a weekly basis, followed by those (237, 38.29%) who did it on a daily basis, those (94, 15.19%) who did it twice a month, and those (19, 3.07%) who did it once a month.

4.4.2 Supervisors

Table 4.2 presents the demographic information of the newcomer respondents' direct supervisors. Among the 119 supervisors, 44 joined the companies between two and three years, accounting for the largest share (37%); 40 did so for more than three years, accounting for 33.6%; 25 did so between one and two years, accounting for 21.0%; 10 did so within one year, accounting for 8.4%. In terms of gender, 64 (53.8%) of them were males and 55 (46.2%) females.

Table 4.2 Demographic information (immediate supervisors)

Supervisor		Frequency	Percentage
Tenure	Less than 12 months	10	8.4%
	13-24 months	25	21.0%
	25-36 months	44	37.0%
	More than three years	40	33.6%
Gender	Male	64	53.8%
	Female	55	46.2%
Age	18-20	0	0.0%
	21-29	21	17.6%
	30-39	26	21.8%
	40-49	45	37.8%
	50-59	26	21.8%
	60 or older	1	0.8%
Education	High school or below	0	0.0%
	2-3-year college	39	32.8%
	4-year university	65	54.6%
	Graduate-level degree	15	12.6%
	None of the above	0	0.0%

Note: n = 119

45 of those supervisors fell into the 40-49 age group, accounting for the largest share (37.8%), followed by 27 in the 30-39 age group (21.8%), 26 in the 50-59 age group (21.8%), and 21 in the 21-29 age group (17.6%). In terms of supervisor education, most of supervisors (65, 54.6%) have attended a 4-year university, followed by the 12.6% (15) who have attended graduate schools, and 32.8% (39) who graduated from 2-3-year colleges. Each supervisor was assigned to rate six newcomers.

4.5 Reliability and validity

This section presents the results of construct reliability, validity assessment, and confirmatory factor analysis. The results of quantitative research are important, but so is the degree to which the researcher ensures the quality, or the rigor, of the study through measurements of reliability and validity (Heale & Twycross, 2015).

A reliable research instrument ensures consistent measurement, whereas a valid research instrument ensures accurate measurement (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Specifically, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 25 was conducted to examine the reliability and validity of the measures. Additionally, the correlations between variables to detect the issue of multicollinearity were also observed.

4.5.1 Reliability test

Regarding construct reliability, it indicates the degree to which the items used to measure a specific construct exhibit consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The commonly used statistical tools and indices in assessing construct reliability include Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability.

Cronbach's alpha indicates the extent to which a set of items or questions intended to measure a specific construct are consistent in their responses (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This coefficient represents the proportion of a scale's total variance attributed to the true score of the latent construct being measured. Researchers typically consider Cronbach's alpha values above .70 to be as indicative of adequate reliability (Hajjar, 2018; Kline, 2015).

According to Table 4.3, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the nine constructs range between .877 and .964, all higher than surpass the threshold of .70. These coefficients suggest that each construct has a strong reliability. These results underscore the consistency of the measurement instruments employed in this research. As for composite reliability (CR), it focuses on the shared variance among the items within a construct (Bacon et al., 1995). The CR coefficients over .70 will suggest that the items consistently measure the same latent construct. As is evident in Table 4.3, all the constructs in this study exhibit composite reliability values that exceed the recommended threshold of .70, thus confirming their strong reliability.

Table 4.3 Reliability

Variable	Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Start-up onboarding practices	AE1	0.719	0.943	0.946	16
	AE2	0.719	0.943		
	AE3	0.659	0.944		
	AE4	0.667	0.944		
	ME1	0.704	0.943		
	ME2	0.699	0.943		
	ME3	0.747	0.942		
	ME4	0.705	0.943		
	ME5	0.783	0.941		
	ME6	0.771	0.941		
	ME7	0.780	0.941		
	OE1	0.686	0.943		
	OE2	0.674	0.944		
	OE3	0.661	0.944		
	OE4	0.671	0.944		
	OE5	0.610	0.945		
Role clarity	RC1	0.772	0.831	0.877	4
	RC2	0.722	0.849		
	RC3	0.718	0.849		
	RC4	0.736	0.843		
Self-efficacy	SE1	0.849	0.950	0.957	8
	SE2	0.807	0.952		
	SE3	0.855	0.951		
	SE4	0.893	0.947		
	SE5	0.835	0.952		
	SE6	0.831	0.951		
	SE7	0.847	0.950		
	SE8	0.826	0.951		
Social acceptance	SA1	0.731	0.852	0.881	4
	SA2	0.747	0.845		
	SA3	0.719	0.859		
	SA4	0.780	0.832		
Helping behavior	HB1	0.820	0.948	0.953	7
	HB2	0.795	0.950		
	HB3	0.804	0.949		
	HB4	0.887	0.942		
	HB5	0.811	0.948		
	HB6	0.904	0.941		
	HB7	0.879	0.944		
Job performance	JP1	0.736	0.899	0.907	4
	JP2	0.828	0.867		
	JP3	0.822	0.868		
	JP4	0.776	0.885		
Job engagement	JE1	0.839	0.954	0.959	9
	JE2	0.834	0.954		
	JE3	0.776	0.957		
	JE4	0.739	0.958		
	JE5	0.772	0.957		
	JE6	0.861	0.953		

	JE7	0.898	0.951	
	JE8	0.902	0.951	
	JE9	0.865	0.953	
	PDO1	0.798	0.899	
	PDO2	0.746	0.906	
Power distance orientation	PDO3	0.734	0.907	0.918	6
	PDO4	0.780	0.901	
	PDO5	0.780	0.901	
	PDO6	0.766	0.903	
	EED1	0.802	0.961	
	EED2	0.807	0.961	
	EED3	0.794	0.961	
	EED4	0.807	0.961	
	EED5	0.837	0.960	
	EED6	0.796	0.961	
Expectation-experience discrepancies	EED7	0.805	0.961	0.964	13
	EED8	0.756	0.962	
	EED9	0.842	0.960	
	EED10	0.827	0.960	
	EED11	0.793	0.961	
	EED12	0.805	0.961	
	EED13	0.769	0.961	

4.5.2 Validity test

As another critical component of empirical research, construct validity indicates the extent to which a measurement tool accurately measures the underlying construct it purports to assess (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). This study examines two elements of construct validity: convergent validity and discriminant validity, as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Convergent validity

Variable	Item	Estimate	CR	AVE
Start-up onboarding practices	Ability-enhancing	0.767	0.790	0.557
	Motivation-enhancing	0.749		
	opportunity-enhancing	0.722		
Role clarity	RC1	0.865	0.879	0.644
	RC2	0.779		
	RC3	0.767		
	RC4	0.796		
Self-efficacy	SE1	0.870	0.959	0.747
	SE2	0.823		
	SE3	0.874		
	SE4	0.915		
	SE5	0.855		
	SE6	0.854		
	SE7	0.869		
	SE8	0.849		
Social acceptance	SA1	0.801	0.883	0.654
	SA2	0.803		
	SA3	0.772		
	SA4	0.856		

	HB1	0.851	0.955	0.753
	HB2	0.823		
	HB3	0.835		
Helping behavior	HB4	0.899		
	HB5	0.819		
	HB6	0.932		
	HB7	0.908		
	JP1	0.779	0.908	0.713
Job performance	JP2	0.889		
	JP3	0.886		
	JP4	0.819		
	JE1	0.860	0.960	0.728
	JE2	0.858		
	JE3	0.802		
	JE4	0.756		
Job engagement	JE5	0.790		
	JE6	0.870		
	JE7	0.919		
	JE8	0.926		
	JE9	0.884		
	PDO1	0.840	0.918	0.652
	PDO2	0.785		
Power distance orientation	PDO3	0.772		
	PDO4	0.826		
	PDO5	0.818		
	PDO6	0.803		
	EED1	0.817	0.964	0.672
	EED2	0.823		
	EED3	0.809		
	EED4	0.822		
	EED5	0.855		
	EED6	0.811		
Expectation-experience discrepancies	EED7	0.821		
	EED8	0.769		
	EED9	0.861		
	EED10	0.846		
	EED11	0.811		
	EED12	0.822		
	EED13	0.784		

4.5.2.1 Convergent validity

Convergent validity is the extent to which items representing a specific construct converge or are highly correlated. It ensures that different items measuring the same construct are indeed measuring the same underlying concept (Carlson & Herdman, 2012). Convergent validity is assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

In CFA, standardized factor loadings are expected to be statistically significant, with a minimum value of .70 (Hair, 2009). In other words, items should load strongly on the construct they are intended to measure. According to Table 4.4, the standardized factor

loadings of all the items exceeded the .70 threshold, suggesting that the convergent validity has been achieved.

Moreover, the AVE is employed to measure the degree of convergence among items representing a construct. The AVE reflects the amount of variance captured by the construct in relation to the total variance of the measurement items. Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended a threshold of .50 for AVE to establish convergent validity. As illustrated in Table 4.5, all the constructs in this study comfortably exceeded this threshold, providing further evidence of their good convergent validity.

4.5.2.2 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity, the counterpart of convergent validity, focuses on distinguishing one construct from others (Farrell & Rudd, 2009). Discriminate demonstrates that the items of a construct that theoretically should not be highly related to each other are, in fact, not found to be highly correlated to each other.

Discriminant validity is important because it shows whether a test accurately targets the construct of interest or if it assesses separate, unintentionally related, constructs. To assess discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE for each construct is compared with the correlations of that construct with other constructs. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of the AVE for a construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs (Rughoobur-Seetah et al., 2021).

Table 4.5 presents the results of discriminant validity and correlation analysis. The diagonal of the table displays the square root of the AVE for each construct, and the off-diagonal elements represent the correlations between constructs. Notably, all the square root AVE values are higher than the corresponding correlation values. This finding unequivocally establishes the discriminant validity of the constructs in this study, as they are clearly distinct from one another.

Table 4.5 Discriminant validity

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.Tenure	2.33	1.181	--														
2.Gender	1.52	0.516	-0.011	--													
3.Age	1.83	0.888	-0.074	-0.001	--												
4.Edu	3.24	0.646	-0.017	0.037	0.003	--											
5.ES	1.55	0.800	.819**	0.009	-.091*	-0.025	--										
6.IF	2.29	0.860	0.001	-0.034	-0.021	-0.051	0.013	--									
7.SOP	3.59	0.876	-0.016	0.007	0.049	-0.054	0.001	0.005	0.746								
8.RC	3.57	0.995	-0.018	0.023	0.026	0.022	0.037	-0.003	.428**	0.803							
9.SE	3.64	0.978	-0.022	0.006	0.020	0.028	0.014	-0.012	.291**	.470**	0.864						
10.SA	3.73	0.890	0.015	-0.059	-0.021	-0.029	0.016	-0.007	.247**	.425**	.438**	0.809					
11.HB	3.66	1.062	0.010	0.008	0.048	-0.068	0.020	0.009	.357**	.325**	.248**	.226**	0.868				
12.JP	3.62	1.045	0.022	-0.030	-0.047	0.015	0.052	-0.018	.224**	.251**	.231**	.250**	.451**	0.845			
13.JE	3.57	1.044	-0.024	-0.044	0.065	-0.037	-0.008	0.042	.337**	.236**	.210**	.157**	.530**	.412**	0.853		
14.PDO	3.57	0.965	-0.030	0.011	-0.010	-0.014	-0.018	0.018	-.112**	-.235**	-.130**	-.144**	-.128**	-.091*	-.110**	0.808	
15.EED	3.54	1.023	0.022	-0.016	0.034	0.039	-0.026	-0.047	-0.033	-0.031	-.079*	-0.037	-.146**	-.188**	-.216**	.169**	0.82

Note: ES = experience with supervisor; IF = interaction frequency with supervisor; SOP = Onboarding (ability-enhancing) practices; RC = role clarity; SE = self-efficacy; SA = social acceptance; HB = helping behavior; JP = job performance; JE = job engagement; power distance orientation = PDO; EED = expectation-experience discrepancies; Dichotomous variables are categorized as dummy variables.

4.6 Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology for this quantitative study of newcomers' organizational socialization in startup firms, including the research design and data collection procedures, questionnaire design, demographic information and initial analysis results (i.e., reliability and validity). The methodological procedures adopted have allowed to collect primary data used to empirically understanding the degree to which startup onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment (role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) may contribute to three of the socialization results are analyzed (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement), as well as the moderating effects of power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies. Detailed statistical analysis regarding the hypothesized relationships between the main variables and the conceptual framework will be presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1 Introduction

This study involves a quantitative analysis to investigate the relationships between startup firms' onboarding practices, newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), three important organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement), newcomers' power distance orientation, and newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies. As Chapter 4 presented, research was designed to collect data from newcomers and their immediate supervisors from Chinese startup firms through online questionnaires.

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative analysis. It is structured as follows: Section 5.2 presents the measurement model assessment results; Section 5.3 presents the results of the multicollinearity assessment; Section 5.4 presents the correlation analysis results; and Section 5.5 presents the results of hypothesis testing, with Section 5.6 presenting a summary of the chapter.

5.2 Measurement model assessment

An important aspect of this research involves evaluating the measurement model. This assessment is crucial to determine how well the hypothesized model fits the empirical data. A well-fitting model indicates that the constructs and their relationships are accurately represented in the research (Varian, 1990).

The measurements of goodness-of-fit includes the chi-square test, which compares the observed data with the expected data, and the coefficient of determination, which is the ratio of the explained sum of squares to the total sum of squares; the comparative fit index (CFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the normed fit index (NFI). These measures provide indicators of the degree to which the estimated relationships account for the variance in the criteria variable. A good-fitting model is one that is reasonably consistent with the data and

does not necessarily require specification.

Six models on the basis of core predictors were constructed: 1) the measures rated by supervisors (two-factor model) and a single-factor model, 2) the measures reported by newcomers (seven-factor model) and a single-factor model, and 3) a general model with the nine constructs (nine-factor model) and single-factor model.

Table 5.1 presents the fit statistics based on the maximum likelihood estimation method. The results suggest that the hypothesized model has reached a good fit. The model produces a significant $\chi2$ value, which is expected due to the complexity of the model and the large enough sample size ($N > 250$) (Hair, 2009). The normed $\chi2$ index is calculated to be 1.691, falling below the suggested threshold of 3.0 (Mulaik et al., 1989). This result indicates that the model is not significantly different from the observed data. Moreover, the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) value equals .0033, and the root mean squared residual (RMR) is .0039, both of which are smaller than the commonly recommended threshold of .05 (Churchill & Lacobucci, 2006). Additionally, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are .965 and .963, respectively, signifying an excellent level of model fit (Xia & Yang, 2019). Moreover, the results suggest that the fit of the nine-factor model was better than that of the five alternative models.

Table 5.1 Assessment of the measurement model

Model fit Criteria		CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	RMR	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
		-	-	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08
Result	Rated by supervisors (2-factor model)	111.636	40	2.791	0.033	0.982	0.976	0.989	0.984	0.989	0.054
	Rated by supervisors (single-factor model)	1553.699	44	35.311	0.221	0.754	0.693	0.759	0.699	0.759	0.235
	Reported by newcomers (7-factor model)	1723.712	1013	1.702	0.035	0.932	0.927	0.971	0.969	0.971	0.034
	Reported by newcomers (single-factor model)	18706.307	1034	18.091	0.322	0.261	0.227	0.272	0.237	0.271	0.166
	General 9-factor model	2636.279	1559	1.691	0.039	0.919	0.914	0.965	0.963	0.965	0.033
	General Single-factor model	23920.026	1595	14.997	0.267	0.267	0.24	0.281	0.253	0.279	0.15

Note: n=620 Supervisor reported factors: helping behavior and job performance; Newcomer reported factors: onboarding practices, role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance, power distance orientation, expectation-experience discrepancies, and job engagement; General model: onboarding practices, role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance, power distance orientation, expectation-experience discrepancies, helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement.

5.3 Multicollinearity assessment

The issue of multicollinearity, where predictor variables in regression analysis exhibit high intercorrelations, should also be checked in empirical research. Multicollinearity can have detrimental effects on the accuracy and interpretation of regression results (Vatcheva et al., 2016). This study follows Oke et al. (2019) to examine the multicollinearity by using VIF in SPSS 25. The VIF values for the predictor variables were as follows: onboarding practices (VIF = 1.242), role clarity (VIF = 1.550), self-efficacy (VIF = 1.421), and social acceptance (VIF = 1.343), all below the threshold of 10. As a result, there are no substantial issues with multicollinearity among those variables in this study. The results are shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Multicollinearity assessment

	Helping behavior		Job performance		Job engagement	
	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF	Tolerance	VIF
Start-up onboarding practices	0.805	1.242	0.805	1.242	0.805	1.242
Role clarity	0.645	1.550	0.645	1.550	0.645	1.550
Self-efficacy	0.704	1.421	0.704	1.421	0.704	1.421
Social acceptance	0.745	1.343	0.745	1.343	0.745	1.343

5.4 Correlation analysis

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was run to determine the relationship between main variables. There were low to moderate, statistically significant positive correlations between onboarding practices and role clarity (rho (618) = .383, p = 0.000), onboarding practices and self-efficacy (rho (618) = .253, p = 0.000), onboarding practices and social acceptance (r (618) = .219, p = 0.000), onboarding practices and helping behavior, (r (618) = .315, p = 0.000), onboarding practices and job performance, (r (618) = .193, p = 0.000), onboarding practices and job engagement, (r (618) = .280, p = 0.000). There was negative correlation between onboarding practices and power distance orientation, (r (618) = -.101, p = 0.012).

There were low to moderate, statistically significant positive correlation between role clarity and self-efficacy (r (618) = .441 , p = 0.000), role clarity and social acceptance (r (618) = .347, p = 0.000), role clarity and helping behavior (r (618) = .294, p = 0.000), role clarity and job performance (r (618) = .211, p = 0.000), role clarity and job engagement (r (618) = .211, p = 0.000), while strong, negative correlation between role clarity and power distance orientation (r

(618) = -.231, p = 0.000).

There were strong, positive correlation between self-efficacy and social acceptance (r (618) = .377, p = 0.000), self-efficacy and helping behavior (r (618) = .209, p = 0.000), self-efficacy and job performance (r (618) = .186, p = 0.000), self-efficacy and job engagement (r (618) = .174, p = 0.000), while strong, negative correlation between self-efficacy and power distance orientation (r (618) = -.130, p = 0.001).

There were strong, positive correlation between social acceptance and helping behavior (r (618) = .216, p = 0.000), social acceptance and job performance (r (618) = .192, p = 0.000), social acceptance and job engagement (r (618) = .141, p = 0.000), while strong, negative correlation between social acceptance and power distance orientation (r (618) = -.153, p = 0.000).

There were strong, positive correlations between helping behavior and job performance (r (618) = .418, p = 0.000), helping behavior and job engagement (r (618) = .508, p = 0.000), and strong, negative correlations between helping behavior and power distance orientation (r (618) = -.129, p = 0.001), helping behavior and expectation-experience discrepancies (r (618) = -.136, p = 0.001).

There were strong, positive correlations between job performance and job engagement (r (618) = .392, p = 0.000), and strong, negative correlations between job performance and power distance orientation (r (618) = -.083, p = 0.038), job performance and expectation-experience discrepancies (r (618) = -.216, p = 0.000).

There were strong negative correlations between job engagement and power distance orientation (r (618) = -.099, p = 0.013), job engagement and expectation-experience discrepancies (r (618) = -.190, p = 0.000). There was a strong positive correlation between power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies (r (618) = .187, p = 0.000).

No significant correlations were found between participants' demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education level) and the criterion variables of interest, suggesting that the observed effects were not unduly influenced by these individual difference factors. Details can be found in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Spearman correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.Tenure	--														
2.Gender	-0.02	--													
3.Age	-0.056	-0.003	--												
4.Edu	-0.011	0.033	-0.013	--											
5.ES	0.824**	-0.008	-0.083	-0.032	--										
6.IF	0.007	-0.032	-0.015	-0.061	0.024	--									
7.OP	-0.021	0.032	0.029	-0.048	-0.026	0.026	--								
8.RC	-0.019	0.04	0.012	0.029	0.029	-0.004	.383**								
9.SE	-0.028	0.008	0.024	0.023	-0.008	0.006	.253**	.441**							
10.SA	0.033	-0.051	-0.019	-0.012	0.016	-0.003	.219**	.347**	.377**						
11.HB	-0.004	0.004	0.037	-0.048	-0.001	0.014	.315**	.294**	.209**	.216**					
12.JP	0.012	-0.026	-0.033	0.01	0.036	0.003	.193**	.211**	.186**	.192**	.418**				
13.JE	-0.03	-0.043	0.056	-0.034	-0.012	0.048	.280**	.211**	.174**	.141**	.508**	.392**			
14.PDO	-0.033	0	-0.029	-0.036	-0.02	0.015	-.101*	-.231**	-.130**	-.153**	-.129**	-.083*	-.099*		
15.EED	0.018	-0.009	0.022	0.016	-0.014	-0.037	-0.018	-0.041	-0.072	-0.039	-.136**	-.216**	-.190**	.187**	--

Note: N= 620; ES = experience with supervisor; IF = interaction frequency with supervisor; OP = onboarding practices; RC = role clarity; SE = self-efficacy; SA = social acceptance; HB = helping behavior; JP = job performance; JE = job engagement; power distance orientation = PDO; EED = expectation- experience discrepancies. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

5.5 Hypothesis testing

This study involved examining the effects of startup firms' onboarding practices on newcomers' adjustment, which further results in newcomers' organizational socialization results; and the roles of expectation-experience discrepancies and newcomers' power distance orientation respectively moderate the above relationship. The data analysis conducted to address the research questions and the associated hypotheses are presented as follows. The study used Hayes Process Macro to examine total, direct, indirect and interaction effects.

Research questions:

RQ1: How do startup firms' onboarding practices affect newcomers' adjustment (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, & social acceptance)? Three hypotheses were analyzed to answer this research question:

H1. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' role clarity.

H2. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' self-efficacy.

H3. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' social acceptance.

The regression analysis results in Table 5.4 suggest that onboarding practices are positively associated with role clarity (β =.470, p < .001), self-efficacy (β = .321, p < .001), and social acceptance (β = .246, p < .001). Such results support Hypotheses 1-3.

Table 5.4 Effect of onboarding practices and power distance orientation on adjustment results

	Role clarity β	Self-efficacy β	Social acceptance β
Onboarding practices	0.470***	0.321***	0.246***
Power distance orientation	-0.175***	-0.081*	-0.09*
Onboarding practices*Power distance orientation	-0.149**	-0.15**	-0.138**
R2	0.233	0.11	0.09
F	62.530 (df=619, p<0.001)	25.430 (df=619, p<0.001)	20.482 (df=619, p<0.001)

Note: p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

RQ2: How does newcomers' power distance orientation affect the impact of on-boarding practices on adjustment (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance)? Three hypotheses were analyzed to answer this research question:

H1a: Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and role clarity, with this relationship being weaker for newcomers with a high-power

distance orientation than those with a low power distance.

H2a: Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and self-efficacy, with this relationship being weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.

H3a: Power distance orientation negatively moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and social acceptance, with this relationship being weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.

Table 5.4 shows that power distance orientation negatively moderates the association between onboarding practices and role clarity (-0.149, p < .01); this result supports Hypothesis 1a.

Power distance orientation negatively moderates the moderates the association between onboarding practices and self-efficacy (-0.15, p < .01); this result supports Hypothesis 2a. Power distance orientation negatively moderates the association between onboarding practices and social acceptance (-0.138, p < .01); this result supports Hypothesis 3a.

Moreover, the author followed Aiken et al. (1991) to probe the interaction values (onboarding practices*power distance orientation) in a simple slope test. According to Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2, and Figure 5.3, a higher level of power distance orientation will weaken the relationships between onboarding practices and role clarity; between onboarding practices and self-efficacy; and between onboarding practices and social acceptance. These figures further support H1a, H2a, and H3a.
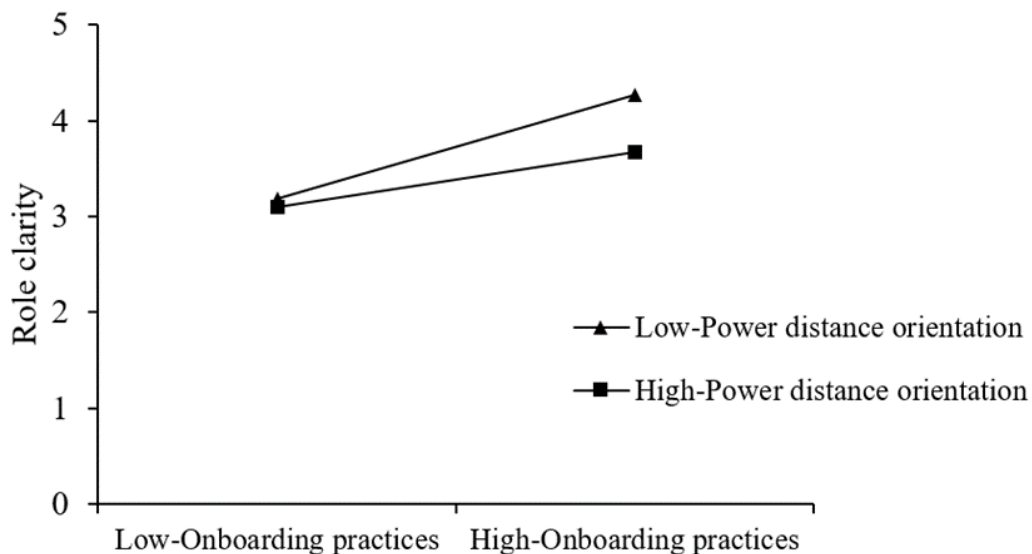
Figure 5.1 Interaction between onboarding practices and power distance orientation on role clarity
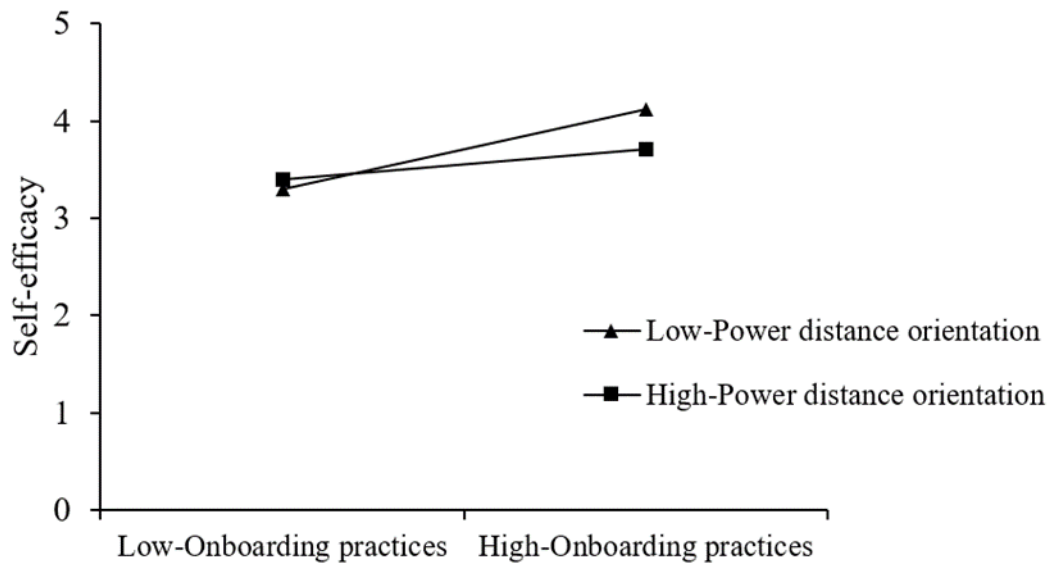
Figure 5.2 Interaction between onboarding practices and power distance orientation on self-efficacy
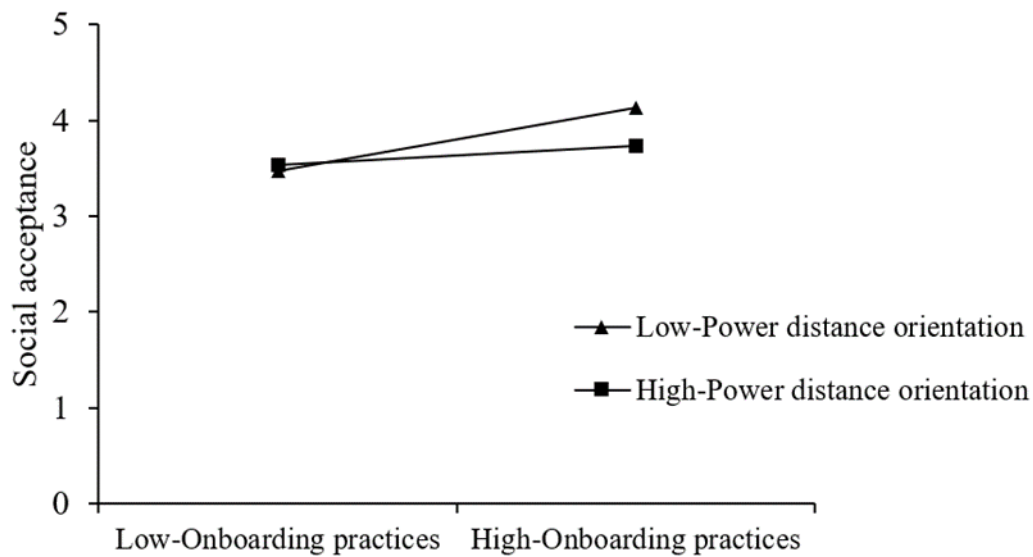
Figure 5.3 Interaction between onboarding practices and power distance orientation on social acceptance

RQ3: How do newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) affect their organizational socialization results (helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement)? Nine hypotheses were analyzed to answer this research question:

H4. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.

H5. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.

H6. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.

H7. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.

H8. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.

H9. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.

H10. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.

H11. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.

H12. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.

The regression analysis results in Table 5.5 suggest that role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior (β = .342, p < .001), job performance (β = .257, p < .001), and job engagement (β = .240, p < .001). Therefore, Hypotheses 4, 5, 6 are supported.

Table 5.5 Effect of role clarity and expectation-experience discrepancies on socialization results

	Helping behavior β	Job performance β	Job engagement β
Role clarity	0.342***	0.257***	0.240***
Expectation-experience discrepancies	-0.141***	-0.183***	-0.213***
Role clarity*Expectation-experience discrepancies	-0.095*	-0.094*	-0.095*
R2	0.132	0.104	0.108
F	31.468 (df=619, p<0.001)	23.924 (df=619, p<0.001)	24.921 (df=619, p<0.001)

Note: p < .05; *** p < .001

The regression analysis results in Table 5.6 suggest that self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior (β = .265, p < .001), job performance (β = .240, p < .001), and job engagement (β = .213, p < .001). Therefore, Hypotheses 7, 8, 9 are supported.

Table 5.6 Effect of self-efficacy and expectation-experience discrepancies on socialization results

	Helping behavior β	Job performance β	Job engagement β
Self-efficacy	0.265***	0.240***	0.213***
Expectation-experience discrepancies	-0.122**	-0.165***	-0.197***
Self-efficacy*Expectation-experience discrepancies	-0.12**	-0.111**	-0.093*
R2	0.089	0.093	0.091
F	20.173 (df=619, p<0.001)	21.071 (df=619, p<0.001)	20.733 (df=619, p<0.001)

Note: p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

The regression analysis results in Table 5.7 suggest that social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior (β = .266, p < .001), job performance (β = .291, p < .001), and job engagement (β = .177, p < .001). Therefore, Hypotheses 10, 11, 12 are

supported.

Table 5.7 Effect of social acceptance and expectation-experience discrepancies on socialization results

	Helping behavior	Job performance	Job engagement
	β	β	β
Social acceptance	0.266***	0.291***	0.177***
Expectation-experience discrepancies	-0.141***	-0.179***	-0.213***
Social acceptance*Expectation-experience discrepancies	-0.084	-0.151**	-0.077
R2	0.075	0.111	0.073
F	16.735(df=619, p<0.001)	25.757(df=619, p<0.001)	16.281(df=619, p<0.001)

RQ4: How do newcomer adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) mediate the relationship between onboarding practices and socialization results (helping behavior, job performance, and job performance)? Nine hypotheses were tested to answer this research question:

H4a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

H5a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.

H6a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.

H7a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

H8a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.

H9a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.

H10a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.

H11a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.

H12a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.

To examine the mediating effect of newcomers' adjustment results between onboarding practices and their socialization results, the author adopted a percentile bootstrap approach to evaluate whether the hypothesized mediating effects were significant.

According to Table 5.8, the significant indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior via role clarity was 8% of the total effect (the 95% CI was 0.032-0.130). Considering that 95% of CI did not include 0, and that the direct effect of this path was also prominent (the 95% CI was 0.211-0.405), the results suggest that role clarity partially mediated the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior. As a result, H4a is supported.

Table 5.8 Mediation estimates of onboarding practices on helping behavior through role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance

	Path	Effect	se	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	Start-up onboarding practices-Helping behavior	0.308	0.049	0.211	0.405
Indirect effect	Start-up onboarding practices-Role clarity-Helping behavior	0.080	0.025	0.032	0.130
	Start-up onboarding practices-Self-efficacy-Helping behavior	0.025	0.017	-0.006	0.062
	Start-up onboarding practices-Social acceptance-Helping behavior	0.020	0.014	-0.005	0.050

In contrast, the indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior via self-efficacy was 2.5% of the total effect (the 95% CI was -0.006-0.062). Since the 95% of CI included 0, the results suggest that self-efficacy did not mediate the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior. As a result, H7a is rejected.

Likewise, the indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior via social acceptance was 2% of the total effect (the 95% CI was -0.005-0.050). Since the 95% of CI included 0, the results suggest that social acceptance did not mediate the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior. As a result, H10a is rejected.

According to Table 5.9, the significant indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job performance via role clarity was 5% of the total effect (the 95% CI was 0.002-0.099). Considering that 95% of CI did not include 0, and that the direct effect of this path was also prominent (the 95% CI was 0.045-0.244), the results suggest that role clarity partially mediated the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job performance. As a result, H5a is supported.

Table 5.9 Mediation estimates of onboarding practices on job performance through role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance

	Path	Effect	se	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	Start-up onboarding practices-Job performance	0.145	0.051	0.045	0.244
Indirect effect	Start-up onboarding practices-Role clarity-Job performance	0.050	0.025	0.002	0.099
	Start-up onboarding practices-Self-efficacy-Job performance	0.031	0.017	-0.003	0.065
	Start-up onboarding practices-Social acceptance-Job performance	0.041	0.015	0.012	0.072

In contrast, the indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job performance via self-efficacy was 3.1% of the total effect (the 95% CI was -0.003-0.065). Since the 95% of CI included 0, the results suggest that self-efficacy did not mediate the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job performance. As a result, H8a is rejected.

Moreover, the indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job performance via social acceptance was 4.1% of the total effect (the 95% CI was 0.012-0.072). Since the 95% of CI did not include 0, and that the direct effect of this path was also prominent (the 95% CI was 0.045-0.244), the results suggest that social acceptance mediated the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job performance. As a result, H11a is supported.

According to Table 5.10, the significant indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' helping behavior via role clarity was 3.4% of the total effect (the 95% CI was -0.013-0.080). Considering that 95% of CI included 0, the results suggest that role clarity did not mediate the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job engagement. As a result, H6a is rejected.

Table 5.10 Mediation estimates of onboarding practices on job engagement through role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance

	Path	Effect	se	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	Start-up onboarding practices-Job engagement	0.330	0.050	0.233	0.428
Indirect effect	Start-up onboarding practices-Role clarity-Job engagement	0.034	0.024	-0.013	0.080
	Start-up onboarding practices-Self-efficacy-Job engagement	0.031	0.017	-0.002	0.067
	Start-up onboarding practices-Social acceptance-Job engagement	0.006	0.013	-0.020	0.034

Likewise, the indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job engagement via self-efficacy was 3.1% of the total effect (the 95% CI was -0.002-0.067). Since the 95% of CI included 0, the results suggest that self-efficacy did not mediate the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job engagement. As a result, H9a is rejected.

The indirect effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job engagement via social acceptance was 6% of the total effect (the 95% CI was -0.020-0.034). Since the 95% of CI included 0, the results suggest that social acceptance did not mediate the effect of onboarding practices on newcomers' job engagement. As a result, H12a is rejected.

RQ5: How do newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies affect the impact of newcomer adjustment (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance) on socialization results (helping behavior, job performance, and job performance)? Nine hypotheses were tested to answer this research question:

H4b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and helping behavior, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H5b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job performance, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H6b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job engagement, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H7b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and helping behavior, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H8b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and job performance, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H9b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and job engagement, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H10b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and helping behavior, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H11b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job performance, with this relationship being weaker when the discrepancies are higher.

H12b: Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job engagement, with this relationship being weaker when the

discrepancies are higher.

According to Table 5.5, expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the association between role clarity and helping behavior (-0.095, p < .05); this result supports Hypothesis 4b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the moderates the association between role clarity and job performance (-0.094, p < .05); this result supports Hypothesis 5b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the association between role clarity and job engagement (-0.095, p < .05); this result supports Hypothesis 6b.

Moreover, the author followed Aiken et al. (1991) to probe the interaction values (role clarity*expectation-experience discrepancies) in a simple slope test. According to Figure 5.4, Figure 5.5, and Figure 5.6, a higher degree of expectation-experience discrepancies will weaken the relationships between role clarity and helping behavior; between role clarity and job performance; and between role clarity and job engagement. These figures further support H4b, H5b, and H6b.

Figure 5.4 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and role clarity on helping behavior

Figure 5.5 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and role clarity on job performance

Figure 5.6 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and role clarity on job engagement

According to Table 5.6, expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the association between self-efficacy and helping behavior (-0.12, $p < .01$); this result supports Hypothesis 7b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the moderates the association between self-efficacy and job performance (-0.111, $p < .01$); this result supports Hypothesis 8b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the association between self-efficacy and job engagement (-0.093, $p < .05$); this result supports Hypothesis 9b.

The author followed again Aiken et al. (1991) to probe the interaction values (self-efficacy*expectation-experience discrepancies) in a simple slope test. According to Figure 5.7, Figure 5.8, and Figure 5.9, a higher degree of expectation-experience discrepancies will weaken the relationships between self-efficacy and helping behavior; between self-efficacy and job performance; and between self-efficacy and job engagement. These figures further support H7b, H8b, and H9b.
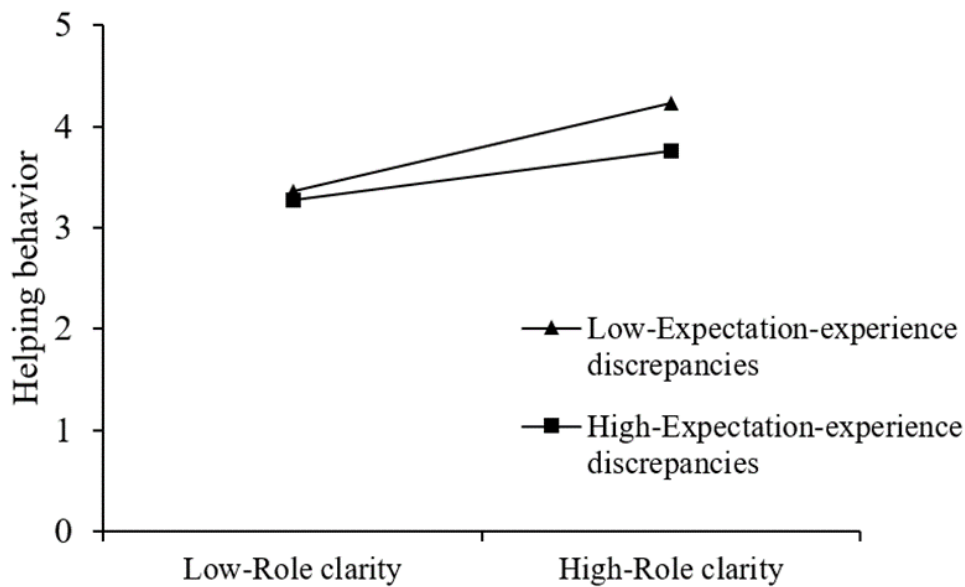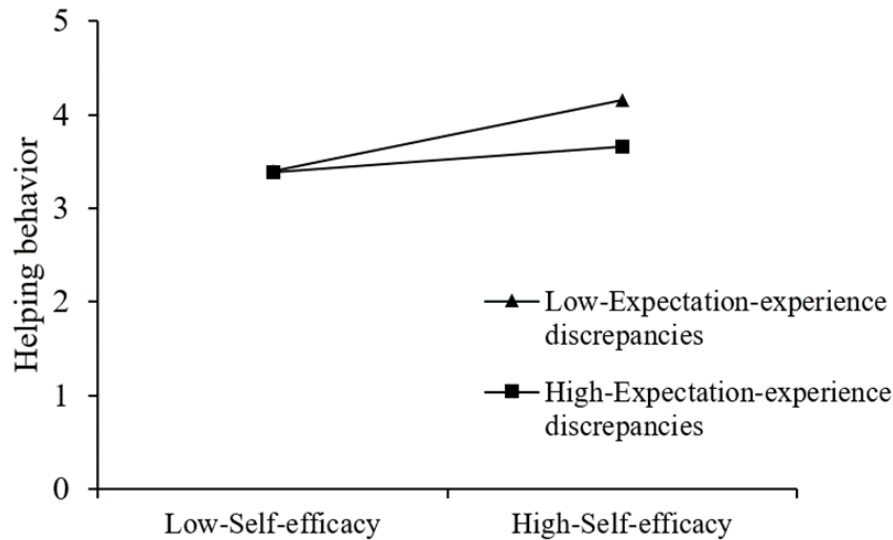

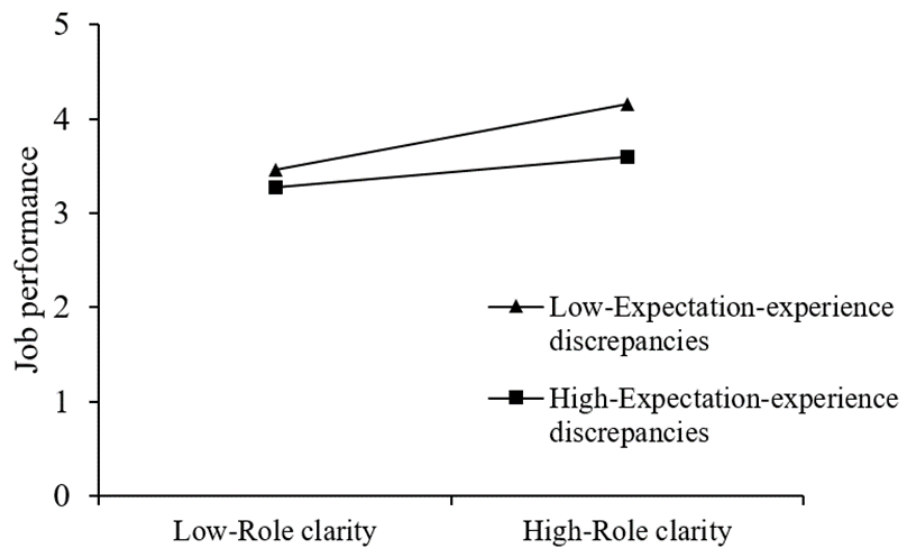Figure 5.7 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and self-efficacy on helping behavior
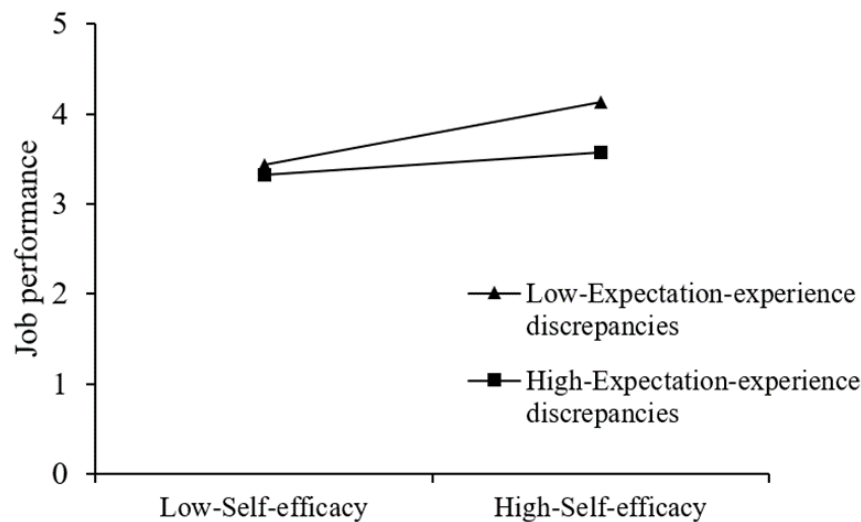
Figure 5.8 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and self-efficacy on job performance
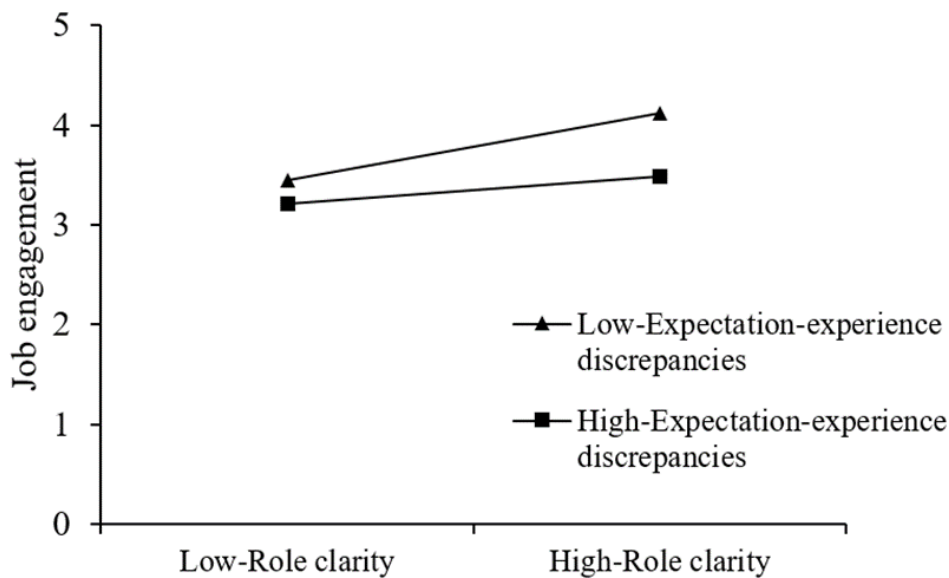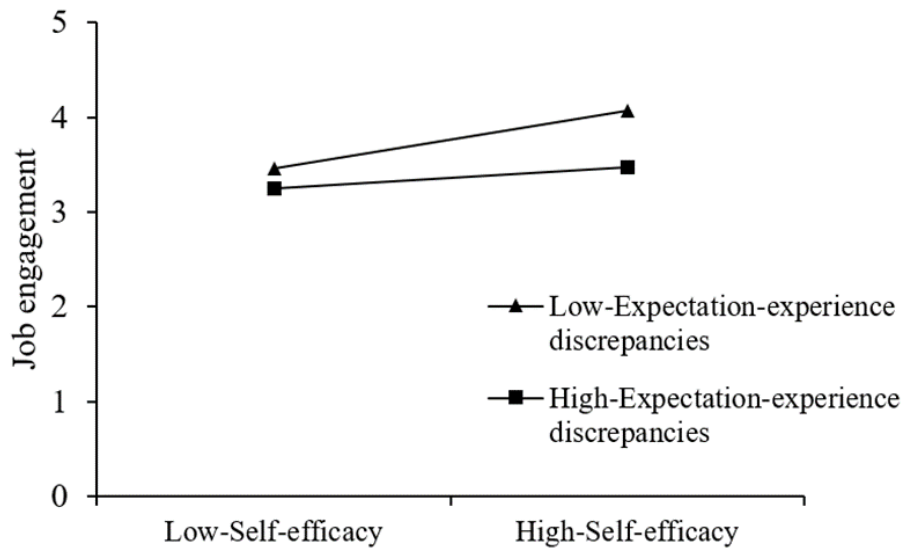
Figure 5.9 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and self-efficacy on job engagement

According to Table 5.7, the hypothesis that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the association between social acceptance and helping behavior (-0.084, $p > .05$) is not supported. This result rejects Hypothesis 10b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderates the association between social acceptance and job performance (-0.151, $p < .01$); this result supports Hypothesis 11b. The hypothesis that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the association between social acceptance and job engagement (-0.077, $p > .05$) is not supported; this result rejects Hypothesis 12b.

Once more interaction values were probed (social acceptance *expectation-experience discrepancies) in a simple slope test. According to Figure 5.10, a higher degree of expectation-experience discrepancies will weaken the relationships between social acceptance and job performance. This further supports H11b.

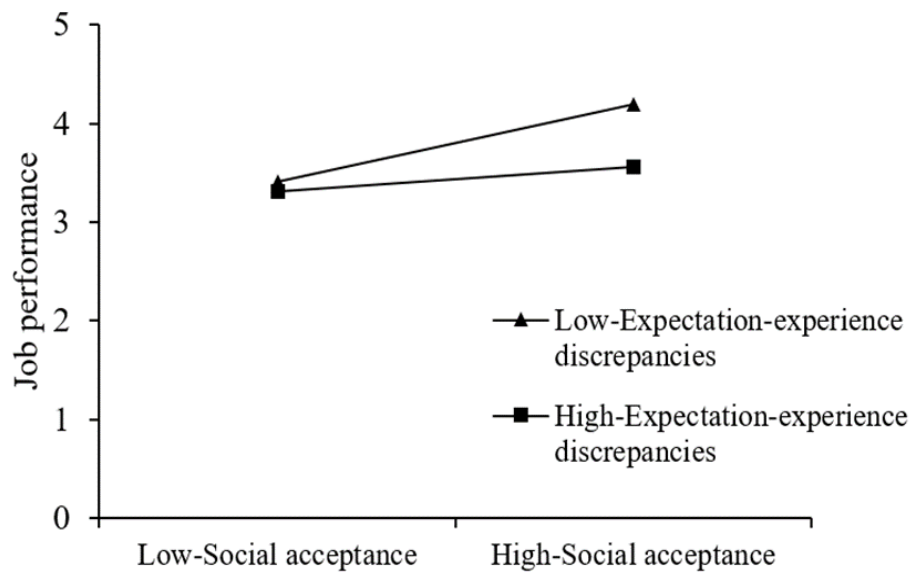Figure 5.10 Interaction between expectation-experience discrepancies and social acceptance on job performance

Table 5.11 summarizes the supported and unsupported hypotheses. Only 8 hypotheses out of 36 were rejected.

Table 5.11 Summary of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Results
H1. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' role clarity.	Supported
H2. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' self-efficacy.	Supported
H3. Onboarding practices are positively associated with newcomers' social acceptance.	Supported
H4. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.	Supported
H5. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.	Supported
H6. Role clarity is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.	Supported
H7. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.	Supported
H8. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.	Supported
H9. Self-efficacy is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.	Supported
H10. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' helping behavior.	Supported
H11. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' job performance.	Supported
H12. Social acceptance is positively associated with newcomers' job engagement.	Supported
H1a. Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and role clarity, with this relationship weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.	Supported
H2a. Power distance orientation moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and self-efficacy, with this relationship weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.	Supported
H3a. Power distance orientation negatively moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and social acceptance, with this relationship weaker for newcomers with a high-power distance orientation than those with a low power distance.	Supported
H4a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.	Supported
H5a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup	Supported

firms and newcomers' job performance.	
H6a. Role clarity mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.	Not Supported
H7a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.	Not supported
H8a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.	Not supported
H9a. Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.	Not supported
H10a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior.	Not supported
H11a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job performance.	Supported
H12a. Social acceptance mediates the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement.	Not supported
H1b. Power distance orientation negatively moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and role clarity.	Supported
H2b. Power distance orientation negatively moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and self-efficacy.	Supported
H3b. Power distance orientation negatively moderates the relationship between onboarding practices and social acceptance.	Supported
H4b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and helping behavior.	Supported
H5b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job performance.	Supported
H6b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job engagement.	Supported
H7b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and helping behavior.	Supported
H8b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and job performance.	Supported
H9b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and job engagement.	Supported
H10b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and helping behavior.	Not supported
H11b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job performance.	Supported
H12b. Expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job engagement.	Not supported

5.6 Summary

This chapter tested research hypotheses about the relationships between startup firms' onboarding practices, newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), three important organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement), as well as the moderating role of newcomers' power distance orientation, and newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies in the previous relationships.

To test the hypothesized relationships, multiple regression analysis was performed using

the SPSS PROCESS Macro. The results of hypotheses testing have been presented and justified. The next chapter contains a discussion of the results reported in this section and compares these findings to those in the literature.

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Chapter 6: Conclusions and Prospects

6.1 Introduction

Startup firms bear tremendous potentials in innovation and growth, yet in practice they frequently experience a high rate of attrition (Gelderen et al., 2005; Szerb & Vörös, 2021). Former studies have attributed such attrition rate to the characteristics of product development and individual characteristics (e.g., personal values, competences, creativity, social capital, human capital, and education) of entrepreneurs (Abatecola & Uli, 2016; S. O. Becker & Hvide, 2022; Hasan & Koning, 2019; Hemingway, 2005; Kimakwa et al., 2021; Rocha & Van Praag, 2020; Shepherd & Gruber, 2021; Zhan et al., 2020), with limited insights on employees.

This study follows the post-heroic view that focuses on non-founder contributors of startup firms: a shortage of human resources. It aims it investigates how newcomers transition into organizational insiders through onboarding practices, and how newcomers' power distance orientations and expectation-experience discrepancies affect their adjustment and organizational socialization results. It answered the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How do startup firms' onboarding practices affect newcomers' adjustment?

RQ2: How does newcomers' power distance orientation affect the above relationship?

RQ3: How do newcomers' adjustment results affect their organizational socialization results?

RQ4: How do newcomer adjustment results mediate the relationship between onboarding practices and socialization results?

RQ5: How do newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies affect the impact of newcomer adjustment results on socialization results?

To answer these research questions, a conceptual model containing 36 hypotheses was developed based on the literature review and a quantitative survey involving 620 newcomers in 84 cultural and creative startup firms in Chengdu and Hangzhou was conducted to verify the hypothesized relationships. 28 of the 36 hypotheses were validated by empirical data, providing important insights to the literature and practice in startup firms and organizational socialization. The following sections will compare the empirical results to those in the

literature (Section 6.2), discuss the practical implications (Section 6.3), suggest the limitations of the study that can lead to future research (Section 6.4), and conclude this thesis (Section 6.5).

6.2 Theoretical implications

This study makes several contributions to the literature on startup firms' onboarding practices and organizational socialization. First, this study adopted the ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO) model (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013) to examine the ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing nature of the onboarding practices in startup firms.

The confirmed association between the AMO model and newcomers' adjustment results and organizational socialization results provides a systematic perspective to the onboarding literature about the sporadic practices (e.g., on-the-job training, company culture training, and compensation for loyalty) involved in the unique context of startup firms onboarding practices (Brattström, 2019; Griva et al., 2021).

Moreover, the proved relationships examined and extended the context where the AMO model can be applied. Examining newcomers' perception of startup firms' onboarding practices through the lens of the AMO model has provided valuable insights that contribute to the literature on onboarding practices, particularly in the context of startup firms, which have received limited attention.

To start with, the AMO model provides a systematic perspective that helps organize and analyze the various sporadic practices involved in the literature (Brattström, 2019). In particular, the AMO model allows the researcher of this study to conduct a structured evaluation of how ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing practices contribute to newcomers' adjustment and socialization outcomes. This systematic approach enhances the understanding of the effectiveness and impact of different onboarding practices in startup firms.

Furthermore, surveying startup firms' onboarding practices through the AMO model extends the existing literature by examining the applicability of this framework in a novel context. By confirming the association between the AMO model and newcomers' adjustment and socialization outcomes in startup firms, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of onboarding practices and highlights the importance of considering the interplay between ability, motivation, and opportunity in facilitating newcomers' integration

and success in startup environments.

Second, this study empirically confirmed the role of onboarding practices on newcomers' adjustment results. The findings resonate with Bauer et al. (2007) regarding the impact of onboarding in reducing uncertainty and align with the organizational socialization model proposed by Van Maanen and Schein (1977). Specifically, the association between start-up firms' onboarding practices and newcomers' role clarity aligns with existing literature regarding how well-designed onboarding programs can affect newcomers' role understanding (Capitano et al., 2022; Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2018).

This result extends the studies that focus on job descriptions and performance metrics (Preenen et al., 2015), suggesting that startup firms need to go beyond job descriptions and help newcomers proactively develop their skills and take on additional responsibilities to achieve flexible adjustments. The association between start-up firms' onboarding practices and newcomers' self-efficacy has been suggested by previous studies (Bauer et al., 2021).

The results of this study suggest that newcomer self-efficacy not only comes from employer training that improves their essential skills (Chong et al., 2021) but also the recognition and reward schemes that can improve their motivation and the opportunities to take ownership of projects.

The association between start-up firms' onboarding practices and newcomers' social acceptance demonstrates how well-designed onboarding practices can create a supportive social environment for newcomers to develop a sense of belonging. This finding concurred with socialization studies (Bauer et al., 2007) that highlight the importance of social acceptance for newcomers to become organizational insiders.

This contribution to existing studies on newcomer adjustment is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence newcomers' experiences and outcomes in startup firms. By recognizing the importance of onboarding practices in shaping newcomers' perceptions and behaviors, researchers and practitioners can develop more effective strategies to support newcomers' adjustment and integration into the organizational culture, ultimately leading to greater success and satisfaction for both newcomers and the organization.

Third, this study empirically confirmed the importance of newcomers' adjustment in their organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement). The positive link between role clarity and newcomer's helping behavior indicates how role clarity helps newcomers to navigate through uncertainty within startup firms, thus more prepared to engage in helping behaviors in collaborative tasks. This finding

concurs with previous studies (Jeske & Olson, 2021) on the impact of setting clear roles in the social exchange between newcomers and organizational insiders (G. Chen & Klimoski, 2003).

The association between role clarity and job performance supports the prediction that role clarity is positively associated with task effectiveness (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). This study explains this association by indicating how role clarity enables newcomers to prioritize their tasks effectively and focus their time on tasks that are mostly related to their job roles. The association between role clarity and job engagement provides implications to studies that warn of reduced newcomer job engagement in work environments filled with uncertainty and stress (Tang et al., 2022).

Indeed, this study unravels the ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing practices that startup firms can develop to improve newcomers' job engagement, especially contributing to the organizational socialization literature on the importance of motivation in newcomer socialization.

This study also empirically confirmed the role of self-efficacy in improving newcomers' helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement in startup firms. Such findings concur with previous studies on the impact of self-efficacy on employees' prosocial behaviors (Ruth & Schramm, 2021), job-related performance (Alikhani & Shahriari, 2022), and job engagement (Guillén, 2021). While these studies investigated the impact of self-efficacy in a general setting, this study confirmed its impact in a very unique context: newcomers' adjustment in startup firms. This finding is important as it answers the research questions regarding the onboarding practices that enable newcomers to become organizational insiders within new organizations that are featured with newness and smallness.

Likewise, the findings also concur with previous studies on the important role of social acceptance on newcomers' helping behavior (Miglani, 2021) and job performance (James, 2020). Indeed, these findings suggest that social acceptance forms the social relationships that drive newcomers to display prosocial behaviors such as helping and job performance in the specific context of startup firms. However, the hypothesized correlation between social acceptance and job engagement was not supported. This surprising finding contradicts the traditional perspectives that posit a direct positive link between social acceptance and job engagement (Qadeer et al., 2020), suggesting the element of complexity within startup firms.

Third, in addition to the direct relationships between onboarding practices and newcomer adjustment results, this study also provides important findings regarding the moderating effects of power distance orientation between onboarding practices and adjustment results.

These findings demonstrate that newcomers with a high-power distance orientation are

likely to struggle with the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in start-up environments, that overly relying on formal instructions may hinder newcomers' proactive engagement with skill development opportunities, and that high-power distance-oriented newcomers may experience social isolation and insufficient engagement of organizational insiders.

The findings regarding the moderating effect of power distance orientation provide nuanced insights into the complex interplay between power distance orientation, onboarding practices, and adjustment outcomes in the context of start-up firms, thereby shedding light on previous findings (Liao et al., 2022; Miglani, 2021; Wesche & Teichmann, 2016).

Fourth, findings of this study shed light on the nuanced relationship between onboarding practices, organizational socialization outcomes, and the mediating role of adjustment results, particularly role clarity. These findings partially concur with previous studies (Mazzei et al., 2023; Norris, 2022) regarding the mediating effects of adjustment results. The results indicate that role clarity plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between onboarding practices and newcomers' helping behavior, and the relationship between onboarding practices and job performance.

These findings add to the literature review (Bauer et al., 2007) in that, while onboarding practices can affect newcomers' helping behavior and job performance, such impact is channelled through newcomers' understanding of their roles within the startup firms. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of social acceptance as another partial mediator between onboarding practices and newcomers' job performance. This concurs with previous studies (Mazzei et al., 2023; A. M. Saks et al., 2007) regarding the importance of a sense of belonging and acceptance during the onboarding process can significantly contribute to employees' performance outcomes within startup environments.

However, not all hypothesized mediating effects were supported in this study. Specifically, the mediating effect of role clarity in the relationship between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' job engagement, the mediating effect of self-efficacy between onboarding practices and socialization results, the mediating effect of social acceptance between onboarding practices in startup firms and newcomers' helping behavior, and between onboarding practices in startup firms and job engagement were not supported.

Such findings could be explained by a number of factors. To begin with, startup firms have unique organizational cultures and rapid changes (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013), which may affect the mediating effect of newcomer adjustment. Additionally, onboarding practices require sufficient resources and formalized procedures. However, startup firms might be restrained by their limited resources and experience (Buschow, 2020; Harney &

Alkhalaf, 2020; Lopez et al., 2023; Neumann, 2021), which can affect the adjustment process of newcomers. For instance, limited support during newcomers' daily work (e.g., after onboarding period) may lead to a weaker mediating effect of newcomer adjustment on outcomes such as helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement.

Fifth, this study also provides important findings regarding the moderating effect of expectation-experience discrepancies on the relationship between newcomer adjustment results and socialization results. The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the link between role clarity and helping behavior suggest that the dynamic startup environments are filled with constantly changing job demands that can result in misalignments between onboarding expectations and actual experiences that prevent newcomers from engaging in proactive helping behaviors.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between role clarity and job performance suggests that mismatches between anticipated job roles and actual experiences can disturb newcomers from aligning their skills and efforts with the changing job demands and harm their job performance.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the connection between role clarity and job engagement suggests that the disparities between newcomers' expectations of reciprocal relationships and the actual experiences during interactions with organizational insiders can cause cognitive dissonance that drives newcomers to reduce engagement and match their efforts with the actual benefits and rewards.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the connection between self-efficacy and helping behavior suggests that disparities between expectations and experiences may lead newcomers to doubt the value of their contributions, potentially reducing their willingness to help others.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the connection between self-efficacy and job performance indicate that newcomers experiencing disparities between expectations and actual experiences may feel less confident and less motivated, thus displaying reduced job performance.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the connection between self-efficacy and job engagement indicates that disparities between newcomers' expectations and actual experiences may induce doubt and uncertainty, challenging their perceptions of competence and reducing their engagement at work.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and helping behavior indicates that discrepancies in

social acceptance experiences may disrupt the link between newcomers' expectations and their willingness to engage in helping behaviors.

The finding that expectation-experience discrepancies negatively moderate the relationship between social acceptance and job performance suggests that the unmet expectations in newcomers' social exchanges may compromise their job-related resources and motivation and thereby affect their job performance.

The above results extend previous studies (S. L. Jordan et al., 2022; Na-Nan & Sanamthong, 2020; Welander et al., 2020; Zou et al., 2020) with the nuanced moderating effects that significantly impact the relationship between newcomer adjustment results and their socialization results. These results also remind the founder of the consequences of not being able to develop systematic organizational routines and ensure the expectations and experience discrepancies among newcomers (Gifford et al., 2021; Park & Kim, 2023).

In short, the study provides a comprehensive framework to illustrate the complex interplay between onboarding practices, newcomers' adjustment, organizational socialization, and the moderating role of expectation-experience discrepancies within the distinctive context of startup firms.

These findings contribute valuable insights to the organizational socialization literature, highlighting the importance of considering newcomers' power distance orientation and managing and aligning their expectations with their actual experiences during the onboarding process to enhance overall organizational outcomes.

6.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study also provide managerial implications to startup firms, human resource professionals, line managers of newcomers, and newcomers.

From the startup firms' perspective, onboarding programs should be developed and implemented to enhance newcomers' abilities, motivations, and opportunities. First, startup firms should design onboarding practices that enhance newcomers' abilities and skills that are essential for their job success.

These practices should target beyond traditional onboarding objectives such as role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance (Bauer et al., 2007). Instead, startup firms' onboarding practices should help newcomers to develop the unique skillsets required to work in a dynamic and fast-paced work environment.

For instance, onboarding programs could be designed to enhance newcomers' technical

skills (e.g., coding on a specific software package) that are relevant to the startup firms' daily operations (McKelvie et al., 2018), cross-functional skills for newcomers to understand not only their specific job roles but also acquire insights into the broader facts of the startup firms' business scope and market aspects (Pinder, 2014).

Moreover, onboarding programs can include startup firms' daily operations in simulated exercises where newcomers can be challenged to proactively develop the essential skills required to propose innovative solutions. Finally, startup firms' onboarding programs should include components that enhance newcomers' communication and leadership skills that can further help them to seek new information proactively, seek ownership, and engage in effective communications in their daily work.

In short, by designing ability-enhancing practices in their onboarding programs, startup firms can help newcomers to understand their job roles, adapt themselves during interactions with organizational insiders while contributing effectively to the startup's organizational objectives.

Second, startup firms should design onboarding practices that align with and enhance newcomers' motivations at work. In startup firms, this can be conducted through onboarding programs that focus on interactivity and engage newcomers in activities that form a dynamic work and learning environment. Doing so seems important because motivation-enhancing activities can inspire newcomers and connect their efforts to the broader business objectives of startup firms.

Those motivation-enhancing practices could include 1) allowing newcomers to understand how the startup firms' values and missions are aligned with newcomers' personal career development, 2) involving newcomers in startup firms' goal-setting exercises and enabling them to perceive how they can contribute and influence employers' organizational goals, 3) designing successful employee sessions where newcomers and organizational insiders can share successful stories and experiences in addressing specific problems; hosting such storytelling events could motivate newcomers to proactively involve in organizational socialization while forming positive relationships with organizational insiders, and 4) presenting startup firms' real challenges and problems to newcomers and allowing them to work with organizational insiders to develop solutions and thus helping newcomers to develop a sense of collective problem ownership.

In addition, involving newcomers in problem-solving activities with organizational insiders could allow newcomers to build relationships that lead to social inclusion and, more importantly, form a mutually supportive work atmosphere that strengthens newcomers'

motivation at work.

Third, startup firms should design onboarding practices, resources, support, and work environments for employees to utilize their abilities and motivation effectively (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). This can be achieved by pairing newcomers with mentors.

Given the limited time of onboarding programs, arranging mentorships within startup firms could allow newcomers to not only continuously receive guidance on their job roles but also 1) benefit from continuous upgrading their knowledge and skills that improve their competence at work, 2) obtain opportunities to undertake challenging tasks and projects that allow them to apply the acquired new skills in real solving new problems, 3) be aware of the pathways for career advancement within the startup firms, so that they can remain aspired and clear about career goals, 4) benefit from the networking opportunities such as industry events and industry memberships to important stakeholders from within and outside of startup firms, so that they can broaden their professional network, and 5) enjoy the empowerment to share insights in the decision-making process within startup firms.

In addition to mentorship programs, startup firms could also consider 1) exposing newcomers to different tasks and roles within the startup, allowing them not only to explore the various aspects of the firm businesses but also to recognize their strengths and room for skill development, 2) ensuring transparent communication channels for sharing their demands and concerns during their organizational socialization process, thereby aligning their individual interests with startup firms' organizational objectives, 3) providing regular feedback to newcomers on their performance and areas for improvement, thus empowering them to actively engage in professional development.

In short, opportunity-enhancing practices can foster a supportive work environment where newcomers can leverage their abilities, stay motivated, and take advantage of ample opportunities for growth and advancement within the startup. In addition to the above

Human resource manager and line managers should recognize their important roles in ensuring newcomers' role clarity. When providing onboarding training and conducting daily meetings with newcomers, these managers should ensure that newcomers have a clear understanding of their roles, which serve as the foundation for the expected outcomes such as enhanced helping behavior, improved job performance, and increased job engagement. To achieve this, these managers should adopt effective and transparent communications during newcomers' organizational socialization process, providing inclusive and accessible channels such as role instructions and question boards to support newcomers' understanding of their roles.

Moreover, human resource managers and line managers should enhance newcomers' confidence in their abilities to undertake job roles and manage relationships within startup firms. This involves identifying the key competencies required for newcomers to succeed in specific job roles and providing essential skill-building opportunities to enhance newcomer self-efficacy, recognizing and praising newcomers for their progress and achievements at work regardless of size and impact, and inviting other colleagues to support newcomers' development.

Finally, human resource managers and line managers should facilitate newcomers' social inclusion by forming an inclusive organizational culture within the startup firms. Doing so is important because respecting newcomers' diversity and perspectives could lead to a sense of belonging. Specifically, those managers could consider arranging welcome sessions and resources that demonstrate the inclusive nature of the startup firm. In addition to training, these managers should lead by example in embracing diversity and actively engaging in diversity training initiatives.

Involvement of these managers could convince newcomers and organizational insiders of the startup firms' commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace so that newcomers and organizational insiders could feel that the organizational culture, communication styles, and work dynamics are aligned at work. In particular, senior managers could regularly interact with newcomers to assess their overall sense of belonging and satisfaction. Given the importance of interacting with organizational insiders, human resource managers and line managers should introduce newcomers to the relevant organizational insiders to a few key team members.

Such introduction serves as the basis for newcomers to recognize the common backgrounds and shared goals and interests between newcomers and organizational insiders, thus forming a sense of shared identity. In summary, human resource managers and line managers can significantly contribute to the achievement of newcomer socialization by fostering inclusivity, promoting diversity and inclusion, and implementing tailored practices to facilitate connections and relationships within the organizational context. In doing so, these managers could help employees with different power distance orientations to find comfortable channels (i.e., formal channels and casual channels) and colleagues to achieve social adjustment.

Newcomers to startup firms should realize the importance of proactiveness in seeking information. They could initiate open communications with organizational insiders to develop mutual understanding and role clarification. To achieve adjustment, newcomers are advised to

effectively use the resources available within startup firms. For instance, newcomers could use the mentorship programs to seek guidance and feedback that can facilitate their personal and professional development. In addition to interactions with mentors and line managers, newcomers should also actively participate in social activities where they can build personal and professional ties with colleagues, express their interests, share experiences, and contribute to a collaborative atmosphere within the startup firms.

The dynamic nature of startup firms may cause expectation-experience discrepancies; newcomers should work with human resource managers and line managers to close the gaps between their expectations and actual experience faced at work. Newcomers should be informed of the possibility of changing job responsibilities and duties and explained how such changes are important for the startup firms' development and their career development and interest.

A mutual understanding of such discrepancies can help alleviate newcomers' confusion, frustration, and potential difficulty in adapting to unexpected changes. Newcomers should timely express their concerns when they feel that new tasks or unanticipated changes affect their confidence in achievement; in return, managers should provide assurance, timely training, and flexible timing to help newcomers close the skill gaps at a comfortable pace. Finally, newcomers should develop personal resilience to adapt and thrive in unexpected challenges.

In short, startup firms can integrate the onboarding programs mentioned above with the ability-enhancing, motivation-enhancing, and opportunity-enhancing practices. These programs can help newcomers achieve the important components of adjustment, including role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance, but also actively contribute to their skill development, motivation, and exposure to growth opportunities within the dynamic startup environment, which collectively lead to positive organizational socialization outcomes such as helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement.

During this process, human resource managers and line managers should consider newcomers' power distance orientation and create an inclusive atmosphere to overcome the negative impact of high-power distance orientation. Newcomers should work with these managers to communicate the occurrence of unexpected job experiences and develop solutions collaboratively.

6.4 Limitations and future research

Despite the researcher's efforts, this study is still subject to some limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, the researcher of this study designed and implemented a dyadic newcomer-supervisor survey to mitigate common method bias, aiming to enhance the robustness of the findings; however, these participants' characteristics may not comprehensively represent the diverse array of newcomers and organizational contexts present in the broader professional landscape. Future studies could consider larger and more heterogeneous samples, encompassing participants from various industries, to ensure a more robust and applicable understanding of organizational socialization dynamics.

Second, this study relied on newcomers and their supervisors' self-reported data, which may present potential biases, as participants may intentionally present socially desirable responses. To address these potential issues, future studies could consider objective measures or observational methods to capture newcomers' organizational socialization experiences more accurately, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research. Alternatively, future studies could consider mixed methods approaches to triangulate the results from different data sources, thus developing a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Third, this study, drawing on data within a specific industrial sector, may have findings that may not be directly generalizable to broader and diverse industrial contexts. To address this limitation, future researchers could consider newcomers' organizational socialization in various industrial sectors and include more control variables which may uncover commonalities and unique features, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of socialization dynamics across startup firms of different sectors.

Fourth, this study did not include the macro-level environmental factors, such as economic conditions and industry developments, which might be affected by the recent COVID-19. Future research could include macro-level variables to explore how changes in the external environment affect newcomers' organizational socialization in startup firms. In doing so, future research could depict a more comprehensive picture of newcomers' organizational socialization processes.

Fifth, this study did not include participants' work regimes and locations during the onboarding process. Specifically, the author did not gather information about whether newcomers were working primarily on the company's premises, remotely from home through telework arrangements, or a hybrid combination. An individual's work environment and extent of face-to-face interactions with supervisors, colleagues, and the organizational context

could influence their perceptions and experiences during onboarding. Those working remotely or in a hybrid arrangement may have limited opportunities for in-person socialization. Such differences in work regimes and interaction modalities were not controlled for in the analysis. Future research can assess work locations and situations as potential moderators that may shape onboarding attitudes, knowledge acquisition, and overall adjustment.

Sixth, this study has limited exploration of onboarding programs conducted through digital technologies. Future studies could examine how technology-based onboarding practices influence newcomers' socialization outcomes in startup firms. Doing so could generate more understanding of the role of online onboarding practices in shaping newcomers' experiences in startup firms.

In conclusion, while this study generates valuable insights into the moderating effects of power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies on newcomers' organizational socialization in start-up firms, the above limitations deserve further investigation. Future research efforts to address these limitations will not only refine our theoretical understanding but also offer more practical and widely applicable insights into the complex dynamics of organizational socialization in startup firms.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study unravels the intricate dynamics of organizational socialization in startup firms, specifically examining the moderating effects of power distance orientation and expectation-experience discrepancies. This exploration has unravelled crucial insights that contribute to the literature on organizational socialization in startup firms and provide valuable implications for both scholars and practitioners.

The first point of this investigation lies in the unique onboarding practices (i.e., AMO-enhancing practices) that shape newcomers' adjustment results (i.e., role clarity, self-efficacy, and social acceptance), as well as the interactive impacts of onboarding practices and power distance orientation on those adjustment results in startup firms.

An extensive review of the literature and empirical results illuminated how power distance orientation influences various facets of adjustment results. In particular, high-power distance-oriented newcomers exhibited distinctive patterns in their adjustment, relying more on formal channels and experiencing challenges in adapting to the collaborative and proactive ethos often inherent in startup cultures.

The second point of this investigation lies in the impacts of newcomers' adjustment results and their organizational socialization results (i.e., helping behavior, job performance, and job engagement). More importantly, this study unravels the essential role played by newcomers' expectation-experience discrepancies in hindering organizational socialization results. Such findings also suggest the potential for these disparities to serve as catalysts for learning and growth within the dynamic context of startup firms.

Embracing these elements can help startup firms improve their onboarding practices, potentially guiding newcomers into continuous learning and development within the organization. By recognizing and addressing these dynamics, both researchers and practitioners can enhance their understanding of how individual differences and experiences affect newcomers' socialization process, ultimately fostering more effective onboarding practices and optimizing the integration of newcomers into startup cultures.

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Annex A

Consent form & questionnaire for newcomers

Consent Form (Newcomers)

University Institute of Lisbon & University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC)

You are invited to participate in a research study on the impact of startup firms' onboarding practices on the socialization process and outcomes of newcomers. This study is conducted by Jinxin Cai, a doctorate student from the University Institute of Lisbon and UESTC. This study requires the participation of newcomers within 2 years of tenure and their direct supervisors.

The survey has been authorized by the employer company. It will take approximately 10-15 minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online survey of multiple-choice questions about your demographic information, perceptions about your company's onboarding practices, work experience, job engagement and other factors that might be related to your work experience.

Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. Only fully completed questionnaires will be considered for data analysis, so please do your best to answer all the questions. If you do not wish to complete this survey, just close your browser.

Although your participation in this research may not benefit you personally, it will help us understand which onboarding practices and factors in startup firms can help to improve newcomers' organizational socialization, which can ultimately enhance their socialization outcomes. Furthermore, it can help us to design effective onboarding programs for newcomer organizational socialization. There are no expected risks to individuals participating in this survey beyond those that exist in daily life. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relationship with the employer firm.

Your answers in this survey will not be exposed to anyone in your organization and are

completely anonymous. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be collected in this survey. Therefore, no information will be included that would reveal your identity, even though the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Xinjin Cai at xxxxx (in China), or via email at xxxx; or my supervisors Prof. Ana Patrícia Duarte at xxxx and Prof. Xu Chen at xxxxx. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire.

I have read and understood the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and, by clicking the submit button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness voluntarily take part in the study.

-Yes

-No

Section I

Please check which can best describe you for each question.

1. Your ascribed participant CODE: __NC1__

2. How long have you worked for your organization?

- Less than six months

- seven- 12 months

- 13-18 months

- 19-24 months

- More than two years

3. How can you describe your gender?

- Male

- Female

- Prefer not to describe

4. What is your age?

- 21-29

- 30-39

- 40-49

- 50-59

- 60 or older

5. What is the highest level of school that you have completed?

- High school or below

- 2-3-year college

- 4-year university

- Graduate-level degree

- None of the above

6. How long have you worked for your current supervisor?

- Less than six months

- seven- 12 months

- 13-18 months

- 19-24 months

7.What is the frequency of interaction with your current supervisor?

-On a daily basis

- Weekly basis

-Twice a month

- Monthly

Section II

The following statements are about your perceptions of your employers' onboarding practices.

Onboarding practices (OP)

8: Did your employer include onboarding practices that help you to gain the knowledge and skills you need to become effective members when you were offered the job?

-Yes

-No

Please read each of the following statements carefully and select the response that most closely matches your opinion regarding the practices of your organization (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither disagree nor agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

OP1-Ability-enhancing practices

9. Our onboarding practices involve skills that make me feel confident that I can always successfully perform whatever is required of me in my job.

10. Our onboarding practices involve skills that enable me to accomplish difficult tasks at work.

11. Our onboarding practices involve necessary knowledge and skills for me to do my job effectively.

12. Our onboarding practices involve skills that help me to keep calm when facing difficulties.

OP2-Motivation-enhancing practices

13. Our onboarding training drives me to put forward best efforts to get the job done.

14. Our onboarding training drives me to get very involved in my work.

15. Our onboarding training makes me fall in love with my work.

16. Our onboarding training makes me feel bursting with energy at work.

17. Our onboarding training makes me feel strong and vigorous.

18. Our onboarding training makes me feel enthusiastic about job.

19. Our onboarding training drives me to work intensely.

OP3: Opportunity-enhancing practices

20. Our onboarding training helps me understand that my assigned workload is fair.

21. Our onboarding training helps me to identify new opportunities to improve my work.

22. Our onboarding training helps me to find help to achieve tasks effectively.

23. Our onboarding training helps me to develop personalized performance standards on my job.

24. Our onboarding training teaches me to negotiate with colleagues or supervisors for enough time to finish my job.

Section III

The next set of statements relates to your work experience. Thinking about your experience at work, please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither disagree nor agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

Role clarity (RC)

25. I know exactly what is expected of me at work.

26. I know what my responsibilities are.

27. I am clear how I will be evaluated for job performance.

28. I have received clear explanations of what has to be done at work.

Self efficacy (SE)

29. My new job is well within the scope of my abilities.

30. I do not anticipate any problems in adjusting to work in this company.

31. I feel that I am qualified for the job I will be doing.

32. I have all the technical knowledge I need to deal with my new job, and all I need now is practical experience.

33. I feel confident that my skills and abilities equal or exceed those of my colleagues.

34. My past experiences and accomplishments increase my confidence that I will be able to perform successfully in this organization.

35. I could handle a more challenging job than the one I am doing.

36. Professionally speaking, my new job exactly satisfies my expectations of myself.

Social acceptance (SA)

37. In this company, I can be easily recognized by colleagues as one of them.

38. I believe most of my colleagues like me.

39. I consider colleagues as my friends.

40. I am pretty popular in this company.

Power distance orientation

41. People at junior levels should not have much power in the company.

42. People at junior levels should carry out the requests of people at senior levels without questions.

43. People at senior levels in organizations have a responsibility to make important decisions for people below them.

44. Once the boss makes a decision, people working for the company should not question it.

45. In work-related matters, managers have a right to expect obedience from their subordinates.

46. A company's rules should not be broken, not even when the employee thinks it is in the company's best interest.

Section IV

Now we ask your personal opinion regarding the way relations should be established in organizations. Please read carefully each statement and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither disagree nor agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

Expectation-experience discrepancies

47. The work contents here were much more difficult that I thought it would be.

48. I did not originally think I would have to work overtime as much as I do.

49. When I first came here, I thought my performance would be better than it is.

50. It is more difficult balancing my time and responsibilities than I thought it would originally be.

51. I had more time pressures than I originally thought I would when I first came here.

52. My tasks are not as rewarding as I thought they would be.

53. It was harder to get in contact with my colleagues than I thought it would be when I first came here.

54. Working here is not as much fun as I thought it would be.

55. I feel like company's recruitment materials were not accurately portrayed.

56. When I first came here, I thought I would feel a better sense of belonging than I currently do.

57. Looking back, it was more difficult to make friends than I originally thought it would be.

58. It was harder adjusting to the new work environment than I thought it would be.

59. It was harder to find social groups than I thought it would be.

Section V

Please think about the way your current work make you feel and indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following set of statement (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither disagree nor agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

Job engagement

When I am working, I feel bursting with energy.

I feel energetic and capable when I am working.

I am enthusiastic about my work.

My work inspires me.

When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.

I feel happy when I am working intensely.

I am proud of my work.

I am immersed in my work.

I get carried away when I am working.

Section VI

Thank you for the time invested in this questionnaire.

Annex B

Consent form & questionnaire for supervisors

Consent Form (Supervisors)

University Institute of Lisbon & University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (UESTC)

You are invited to participate in a research study on the impact of startup firms' onboarding practices on the socialization process and outcomes of newcomers. This study is conducted by Jinxin Cai, a doctorate student from the University Institute of Lisbon and UESTC. This study requires the participation of newcomers within 2 years of tenure and their direct supervisors.

The survey has been authorized by the employer company. It will take approximately five minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online survey of multiple-choice questions about your demographic information and perceptions about newly hired employees' helping behavior.

Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. If you want do not wish to complete this survey, just close your browser.

Although your participation in this research may not benefit you personally, it will help us understand which onboarding practices and factors in startup firms can help to improve newcomers' organizational socialization, which can ultimately enhance their socialization outcomes. Furthermore, it can help us to design effective onboarding programs for newcomer organizational socialization. There are no expected risks to individuals participating in this survey beyond those that exist in daily life. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your current status or future relationship with the employer firm.

Your answers in this survey will not be exposed to anyone in your organization and are completely anonymous. Faculty, staff, students, and others with permission or authority to see your study information will maintain its confidentiality to the extent permitted and required

by laws and university policies. The names or personal identifiers of participants will not be collected in this survey. Therefore, no information will be included that would reveal your identity, even though the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Jinxin Cai at +xxxxx (in China), or via email at xxxxx; or my supervisors Prof. Ana at xxx@iscte-iul.pt and Prof Chen at xxxx. Please print a copy of this consent form for your records, if you so desire.

I have read and understood the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and, by clicking the submit button to enter the survey, I indicate my willingness voluntarily take part in the study.

-Yes

-No

Section I

Please check which can best describe you for each question.

1. Your ascribed participant CODE: __SUP1__

2. How long have you worked for your organization?

- Less than 12 months

- 13-24 months

- 25-36 months

- More than three years

3. How can you describe your gender?

- Male

- Female

4. What is your age?

-　18-20

-　21-29

-　30-39

-　40-49

-　50-59

-　60 or older

5. What is the highest level of school that you have completed?

-　High school or below

-　2-3-year college

-　4-year university

- Graduate-level degree

- None of the above

Section II

Now, please read each of the following statements carefully and select the response that most closely matches your opinion about a newly hired employee (according to assigned codes; 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither disagree nor agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree)

Newcomer helping behavior (rated by supervisors)

6. This particular co-worker volunteers to do things for this company.

7. This particular co-worker helps orient other new employees in this company.

8. This particular co-worker attends functions that help this company.

9. This particular co-worker assists others with their work for the benefit of the company.

10 This particular co-worker gets involved to benefit this company.

11. This particular co-worker helps others learn about this company.

12. This particular co-worker helps others with their work responsibilities.

Newcomer Job performance (rated by supervisors)

13. This particular co-worker has generated excellent work output.

14. This particular co-worker has been performing well according to his/her job description.

14. This particular co-worker has worked very well with coworkers.

15. This particular co-worker has gone above the call of duty in his/her concern for the firm.

Section III

Thank you for the time invested in this questionnaire.